

ENCOUNTERING GOD IN MUSICAL
WORSHIP: AN INVITATION TO
TRANSFORMATION

Lori K. True

Bachelor of Arts, Azusa Pacific University, 1989
Master of Music, California State University Sacramento, 2008
Master of Ministry, United Theological Seminary, 2018

Mentors

Thomas Jones, DMin
Ian Dunn, DMin

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ABSTRACT

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by
Lori K. True
United Theological Seminary, 2021

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Thomas Jones, DMin
Ian Dunn, DMin

A model was designed for the evangelical church in the Bay Area, California to encounter God in musical worship with increased engagement and Spirit-led transformation. The hypothesis is participants taught vulnerable and authentic worship with an expectation of encountering the Holy Spirit would relay at least one: increased intimacy with God, heightened awareness of his presence and accompanying characteristics; physical/emotional healing; increased desire to worship; greater sense of purpose and freedom in worship. Methodology included surveys, interviews, testimonies, and focus groups for this phenomenological study. The results revealed the model's effectiveness as participants experienced at least one anticipated outcome.

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I am in awe of the One who called me on this journey and continually presents new adventures—this was one I honestly never thought I would embark on. I was surprised at your invitation, thrilled to have the chance to learn along the way, committed to following your lead, and confused at times as to why this road. Now on this side, I am simply honored to join you into the unknown and remain ever grateful that you have given me the strength and resources to complete this section of the road.

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from your continual pursuit of God and humility in seeking his will. Thank you for just saying “yes” and freely sharing with open hearts! Colin—when you received the last-minute urgent request, you didn’t hesitate but hopped on a plane and came to the rescue with a newly purchased guitar in tow. Thank you for doing whatever needed to be done along the way! Kadin and Ele—you have both had to daily live the reality of your mama spending countless hours at the computer and weeks away at school and have been nothing but supportive. Your constant encouragement to finish the work even when it cost you something has been humbling—thank you for letting me know that you are always in my corner!

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process. I so appreciate the wealth of wisdom, humble spirit, and love for Jesus evident in our body and count it a privilege to worship alongside each of you!

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humility and commitment to serving Jesus and his people is stunning. Dr. Ryan Howell—I am honestly not sure how I would have completed this project without you! I know God would have provided a different way for me to struggle through the stats, but I am so glad it was through your particular expertise as you made it almost fun! Your encouragement and generosity in serving has been beyond what I could have asked or imagined—thank you.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Christopher, Chloe, Colin, Kadin and Ele. It is my greatest privilege and humility that I have been chosen to be your mom. May you continue to go deeper and deeper into the Father's heart in this life of worship.

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Whenever, though, they turn to face God as Moses did, God removes the veil and there they are—face-to-face! They suddenly recognize that God is a living, personal presence, not a piece of chiseled stone. And when God is personally present, a living Spirit, that old, constricting legislation is recognized as obsolete. We're free of it! All of us! Nothing between us and God, our faces shining with the brightness of his face. And so we are transfigured much like the Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him.

—2 Corinthians 3:18, MSG

INTRODUCTION

As a child, I cultivated a life of worship and have had the privilege of leading others in worship for most of my adult life. The evangelical church which stewarded most of my Christian growth set the tone for congregational worship from a young age beginning with the hymnal, expanding to Maranatha worship choruses, and then contemporary Christian songs born from such groups as Hillsong and Elevation. Although the words we sang were filled with truth, freedom, and celebration, the American evangelical church at large that was my world seemed somewhat lacking in displaying that stated freedom, joy, and unabashed intimacy with God when the time came to join in musical worship.

It seemed that many people treated times of musical worship as an introduction to the “main” portion of the service—the sermon. There also seemed to be little expectation of God personally meeting with them during this time of worship. Overall engagement often seemed passive and somewhat self-conscious, and yet many of these same reticent congregants could be found screaming and shouting at a concert or sporting event. Is this what God truly meant for worship to be or could our connection with God himself be deepened in worship as our expectations increased and the walls we have so carefully constructed as a means of self-protection came down?

The spiritual awakening I experienced in 2016 took me deep into God’s heart for worship and into an intimacy with him I had never realized was previously wanting. The

newfound freedom I began to experience seeped from worship into every area of my life and his love became a tangible thing pervading my waking and sleeping. It fueled a new passion for worship throughout my day as I had never felt closer to him than when I was giving and receiving in that time with him. My perspective on life shifted as I seemed to view life more clearly from his kingdom perspective and being transformed by the renewing of my mind seemed much more accessible than before. The real change in me fueled my desire to help others experience a similar intimacy with God—I felt him calling me to reveal his passion to connect in worship without barriers with each one of his children. Thus, this doctoral journey and corresponding project was born.

Worshippers generally recognize the evident purpose of worship: to give God the glory and honor he is due. Still, many seem to be unaware of the broader biblical basis and God's desire for connection with his people in worship. Nevertheless, the Bible lays out a clear picture for what can be expected when the people of God meet with him in worship. If worshippers can better comprehend the foundational nature of worship to their relationship with God and what he wants to do through their work of worship, would their desire to meet with him in worship increase? Would their engagement during worship be more enthusiastic? Would worshippers feel a deeper connection with God?

In laying out the biblical foundations for the project, Psalm 149 was found to be a highly suitable passage as it provides the reason for why one should worship, how they are to worship and what they can expect their worship to accomplish. This outline became the basic blueprint for the project in establishing a format for teaching including a biblical illustration of worship in a communal and private setting. Psalm 149 accentuates the identity of worshippers as belonging to the King. They are his children,

and he cares for them as they sing out a “new song” conveying the kingdom of God breaking in on the earth. As such, his worshipers are called to be his partners in ushering in his kingdom as they establish his sovereignty over all people and other kingdoms. Understanding the mandate as worshipers is vital to the project as it enables one to take up their authority as they are seated with Christ in the heavens. From this perspective, they are better able to engage in prophetic worship in agreeing with the Lord for his will to be done.

Looking in the rearview mirror to the past can teach us how to prepare for the future. As such, the Welsh Revival of 1904–5 was identified as a profound example of how worship took up residence in a small community resulting in the large-scale transformation of a nation whose ripples were felt around the globe. This revival undergirds the transformative nature of encountering God in worship and its accompanying characteristics. The hallmarks of this revival include a strong awareness of the presence of God, freedom in following the lead of the Holy Spirit and the comingling of worship and prayer, which are all appropriate and integral to informing the project.

When considering an appropriate theological basis, the theology of intimate worship was easily identified as God has always pursued intimacy with his *imago dei*. With this awareness in mind, considering how that is accomplished and what one can realize through intimate worship are vital to the purpose of the project. In glimpsing God’s plan, one can more assuredly be vulnerable and authentic before him in yielding to his tender touch with confident expectation of being conformed to his image.

The exciting field of neuroplasticity reveals that our brains are designed for transformation long after childhood. What kind of transformation we undergo will largely

be determined by what we worship and how intentional we are in promoting healthy rewiring of the brain's networks. Neurotheology has discovered that engaging in gratitude and worship promotes healthy brain, mind, and body connections—regularly participating in worship helps to shut down negative neural pathways while opening new ones. In this process, it is vital to have a right view of God as a loving Father—the kind of God we worship helps determine whether the growth is positive or negative. These studies revealed critical scientific underpinning for the worship project.

The final chapter culminates the learning that took place from all four foundational topics: biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary and applies it to the action research project. A weekend teaching/worship workshop was designed to explore the hypothesis that participants taught vulnerable and authentic worship with an expectation of encountering the Holy Spirit would relay at least one: increased intimacy with God, heightened awareness of his presence and accompanying characteristics; physical/emotional healing; increased desire to worship; greater sense of purpose and freedom in worship. This model was designed for the evangelical church in the Bay Area, California to encourage participants to encounter God through worship with increased engagement and Spirit-led transformation.

The weekend workshop was titled Encounter: An Invitation to Transformation and took place the last weekend of March 2021. Participants came primarily from three churches in the Bay Area, as well as a few from out of the area, as attendance both virtually and in-person was available. To facilitate this engagement in worship, participants were taught the biblical basis for worshipping God in spirit and truth, including barriers that keep worshipers from doing so and ways to remove those barriers.

Extended times of worship were interspersed throughout so that participants had opportunities to practice experiencing the presence of God. The data collection tools for the phenomenological study included pre and post-surveys, focus groups, as well as interviews and testimonies. The pre-surveys were given immediately prior to the event to help establish baselines of participants' views and habits in worship. Post-surveys were given following the workshop to measure any changes or growth from the pre-surveys. Focus groups were facilitated mid-way through the workshop to give voice to the attendees' perspectives, as well as to provide an opportunity for participants to process, learn from and encourage one another. A week or more after the event, post-interviews were conducted with worship leaders, as well as opportunities given for attendees to send in testimonies by phone or email.

Workshop participants reported gains in all four aspects of the project's hypothesis' with statistically significant increases in three of the four tenets. Attendees' awareness of God's presence and accompanying characteristics was measured with a majority of respondents reporting an increase in their perceived intimacy with God and their ability to "hear" him, along with experiencing his characteristics of peace, love, joy, hope and faith. The project was quite effective in increasing participants' desire to worship as over 85% of respondents reported a growth in their desire to meet with God in worship. Attendees also experienced a new understanding in their sense of purpose in worship from the workshop as about 75% relayed an increase in this area. Additionally, participants seemed to gain substantial and measurable freedom in their expressions of worship when in an environment that fostered an atmosphere of freedom with mean increases as high 83%. It became difficult to measure physical and emotional healing

with the projects' limited span of time, although 30–44% of attendees reported an increase in the strength of their beliefs regarding God desiring to heal them both physically and emotionally and several relayed receiving emotional and/or physical healing of some kind.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

Every person is created as a unique expression of the Creator God, raised in a distinct environment and journeying through a particular set of circumstances incomparable with any other. This individuality is further heightened when we are adopted into the body of Christ and given various gifts for the benefit of his church. While this individuality is a beautiful manifestation of the heart of God, its highest purpose is to bring glory to God and contribute to the common good of all believers (1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:10–11 [English Standard Version]). As we examine our own journey in light of pursuing the call of God, we begin to recognize our unique opportunities to answer the needs presented in the surrounding ecclesial culture. For this purpose, my ministry context was first examined in determining the pertinent needs. Second, a survey of the spiritual journey reveals the ministerial talents, gifts and experiences accompanying a particular call of God. Finally, the convergence between the two is revealed as the basis for informing the applicable doctoral ministry project.

Context of the Evangelical Church in the Bay Area

The primary broader ministry context utilized for this study is the contemporary evangelical church in the San Francisco Bay Area, often referred to as the Bay Area, or

simply the Bay. This context will be examined by first identifying the commonly held central tenets of an evangelical in order to provide a shared framework for the term and the reasons for its continued use despite its current political implications. Current areas of ministry, as well as the implications of the Western world's current shift to a post-Christian society on the evangelical church today will also be explored. Within the broader context, my place of ministry will be established as a secondary context and microcosm of the contemporary evangelical church in the Bay Area.

How one defines the term is crucial to our understanding of what it means to be evangelical in the Bay. Historian David Bebbington has provided a widely accepted definition of what it means to be evangelical, identifying four fundamental characteristics or “quadrilaterals”: a particular regard for the Bible; conversionism, the belief that people need to have changed lives; activism, living and sharing the gospel message; and an emphasis on the centrality of the cross of Jesus.¹ While individuals' and church's strict adherence to these four quadrilaterals varies, they have provided a generally accepted framework for understanding what it means to be evangelical. Although not a “hard and fast designation,” evangelical's usefulness lies in characterizing a certain way of being religious while transcending denominational lines.²

A microcosm of the evangelical church in the Bay Area is my home church, Willow Spring Community Church. Self-described as a “Christ-centered, evangelical, interdenominational, Bible-driven church, WSCC is committed to carrying out the Great

¹ D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 3.

² Mark Noll, “THE JESUS FACTOR” (Frontline, April 29, 2004), <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/jesus/interviews/noll.html>.

Commission (Matthew 28:18–20) and the Great Commandment (Mark 12:29–31).”³

Willow Spring’s stated values align with each of the quadrilaterals of evangelicalism, claiming an independent status with no umbrella associations or other affiliations.

Although this church has experienced times of growth and severe setbacks, its people have remained committed as a faithful and inviting body of believers desiring to live out God’s love to their surrounding community.

History of Evangelicalism and Willow Spring Church

The word “evangelical” comes from the Greek, *Euangelion* meaning “content of the good news that is being proclaimed or the act of proclaiming it.”⁴ Protestants led by Martin Luther in the sixteenth century adopted the term “to emphasize their reliance on the gospel message they found in Scripture.”⁵ The use of the word increased in the eighteenth century as believers, converted in the revivals of evangelists Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield and John and Charles Wesley, began to use the title to differentiate themselves from those who practiced an outward adherence to religion.⁶ Evangelists, such as Charles Finney and Dwight L. Moody became some of America’s most famous evangelicals around the time of the Civil War as they spread the message of the gospel. Throughout this age of modernity characterized by rational thinking, it is no

³ “Willow Spring Church | About Us,” <http://willowspringchurch.com/new-to-willow/about-us>.

⁴ David Seal, “Euangelion,” in *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

⁵ Catherine A. Brekus, *Sarah Osborn’s World: The Rise of Evangelical Christianity in Early America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 5.

⁶ “Evangelicals,” *National Association of Evangelicals* Winter 2017/18 (n.d.): 16, <https://www.nae.net/evangelicals-winter-2017-18/>.

surprise that evangelicals found themselves defending the tenets of their faith and increasingly turning to reason as a means of evidencing truth.⁷

By the end of the Second World War, being evangelical was almost synonymous with being Protestant.⁸ The propagation of evangelicalism became even more widespread through the use of the burgeoning technology of the twentieth century and additional groups began to adopt the term, including Pentecostals, Mennonites, Christian Reformed, and Lutherans.⁹ In 1976, evangelicalism gained new footholds in society as Jimmy Carter became the first president to call himself a “born-again” evangelical and the NAE (National Association of Evangelicals) had grown in numbers from representing approximately two million to about fifty million people.¹⁰ This new recognition of the power of the evangelical vote fueled strong political funding for conservative ideals. Subsequently, evangelicals became almost synonymous with Christians who are politically conservative.

Nestled in the hills of Moraga, Willow Spring is located in the Bay Area, thirty minutes east of San Francisco. In the early part of the twentieth century, Moraga became a prosperous ranch, managing to attract Saint Mary’s College, which became a thriving part of the community. The town officially incorporated in 1974, and together with the adjoining towns of Lafayette and Orinda is commonly known as Lamorinda, with many activities and events shared between the three communities. Moraga is now distinguished

⁷ Dennis Wayne Hiebert, “‘Come Healing of the Reason’: Problematic Practices of Rationality in Christian Faith,” *Didaskalia* 26 (2016): 49–84, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials, EBSCOhost.

⁸ “Evangelicals,” 16.

⁹ “What Does Fuller Mean by ‘Evangelical’?,” *Fuller Studio*, last modified February 16, 2015, <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/fuller-mean-evangelical/>.

¹⁰ “What Does Fuller.”

as the most peaceful and rural town in Lamorinda, remaining tucked in the hills, with very little new construction permitted.

In 1959, in the midst of Moraga's development boom, a handful of families decided the timing was right to plant a local church, naming it Valley Church. They founded it on biblical principles shared from their joint experience in the Plymouth Brethren church most had attended in neighboring Oakland. Valley Church was originally an elder-led assembly with teaching responsibilities shared between each of the elders until the first full-time pastor was hired in the 1980s. After his retirement in 1994, the church had two subsequent pastors accompanied by varying types of ministries with seasons of church growth and decline.¹¹ As the church's focus shifted, so did the name, first becoming Living Word Community Church to signify its then charismatic leaning, and finally Willow Spring Community Church (WSCC) to emphasize education and the building's central role in the region's history.

In 2014, Eric True was called to be the fourth Lead Pastor and I (his wife) was hired as the Worship Pastor. When the Trues came, the church had dwindled to a small group of mostly elderly people and they were yearning for—yet somewhat wary of—new leadership. During the first couple of years of the Trues' tenure, church-wide healing happened as new relationships formed, and mutual trust was built. Two capital campaigns were instigated and completed to fund much-needed building renovations and the hiring of a youth/family pastor. New families were added, and Willow Spring began to flourish once more.

¹¹ Samuel Austin, "A History of Willow Spring," 2015. WSCC's largest weekly Sunday attendance of approximately 110 was during its second pastor, Arthur Worthington's tenure and its lowest was said to average 15 in the interim immediately following Worthington.

Demographics

Statistical trends reveal increasingly diminishing evangelical numbers in America as the population ages, with the smallest percentages of evangelicals to be found in the Millennials (11–12%). The trends from 2007 to 2014 reveal an overall decline of the evangelical population by 1% across all age groups, with the exception of the Silents shrinking by 4%. Additionally, those with higher levels of education are also less likely to be considered evangelical. Indeed, an inverse correlation has been noted as the higher one's education, the less likely they are to align with evangelicalism.¹² Not surprisingly, the Bay with its high levels of educational attainment is noted for having the third-lowest percentage of evangelicals in the nation with 10% of the population self-designating as evangelicals, behind only New York and Boston with 9% each.¹³ According to the NAE's strict definition of what it means to be evangelical, White, Non-Hispanics are the most likely group to identify with the term, although their numbers are also in decline, falling from 23% in 2006 to 17% of Americans just 10 years later.¹⁴ This shift differs from evangelicalism as a whole, which has historically remained steady in contrast to

¹² "What Does Fuller."

¹³ "The Demographic Statistical Atlas of the United States - Statistical Atlas," <https://statisticalatlas.com/metro-area/California/San-Francisco/Educational-Attainment>. The San Francisco Bay Area has 53.5% of its population holding a post-secondary degree compared to 38.5% of the nation at large.

¹⁴ "Evangelical Beliefs and Identity," <http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Evangelical-Beliefs-and-Identity.pdf>. Terms are according to the U.S. Census Bureau's race designations; "Amid Evangelical Decline, Growing Split between Young Christians and Church Elders," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 10, 2017, <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Politics/2017/1010/Amid-Evangelical-decline-growing-split-between-young-Christians-and-church-elders>.

mainline Protestant denominations, in decline through the last several decades.¹⁵ The subset within the evangelical umbrella experiencing the largest growth is the nondenominational church, reflecting a continued shift away from more highly organized forms of Christianity.¹⁶

While the younger generation and white America distances itself from the designation, many still seek to retain their core evangelical beliefs even as the shape of evangelicalism broadens. Renewalists, an umbrella term to signify the interconnected set of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements and often counted among evangelicalism, emphasize the presence of the Holy Spirit and operation of the *charismata* set of gifts, primarily those dealing with tongues, signs and wonders.¹⁷ These movements are experiencing astounding growth on the global horizon, doubling Christianity's growth rate by 2020, representing almost 28% of all Christians internationally.¹⁸ Indeed, it is projected that by 2025, 75% of all Christians will be located in the global South, already currently considered the center of Christianity.¹⁹ While not as dramatic, the global growth is also being felt at home as Renewalist numbers continue strong as the only other

¹⁵ "American Religion Statistics: Trends in U.S. Religious Affiliations," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*, May 12, 2015, <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/chapter-1-the-changing-religious-composition-of-the-u-s/>.

¹⁶ "American Religion Statistics." The largest segment of growth within the evangelical community is the nondenominational family, which has increased from nine percent in 2007 to thirteen percent seven years later.

¹⁷ "Christianity in Its Global Context, 1970-2020," 10, 90, last modified June 2013, <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/research/documents/ChristianityinitsGlobalContext.pdf>.

¹⁸ "Christianity," 7.

¹⁹ "Christianity," 14.

segment in addition to nondenominationalism experiencing year-to-year growth in evangelical America.²⁰

Similar to the inverse correlation between one's level of education and alignment with the core beliefs of evangelicalism, the Bay Area, with its high level of education is listed in the top ten of most post-Christian cities in the U.S.²¹ While the town of Moraga is not noted for its diversity, WSCC is an exception, and may be the most diverse community within the town. Diversity is felt in its generational representation as well, with a significant retiree segment connecting with the newer younger families, many of whom are among those recently transplanting to Moraga for the schools.

The Present State of Evangelicalism

Evangelicalism, historically characterized by reason and rationalism as a response to the previous age of modernity, has struggled to find its relevancy in a postmodern world noted for its lack of absolute truth. No longer looking through the lens of rationalism and objectivity, postmodernism rejects organized religion replacing it with spiritualism and an openness to the supernatural.²² Evangelicalism, often perceived as “life lived in conformity to ‘objective’ roles, duties, and obligations,” is becoming more

²⁰ “American Religion Statistics.” As non-denominational churches include many Renewalist congregations, the share of Renewal congregations most certainly is larger than the .2 percent growth represented here.

²¹ “The Most Post-Christian Cities in America: 2017,” *Barna Group*, <https://www.barna.com/research/post-christian-cities-america-2017/>. The greater Bay Area is listed at number 8.

²² Graham Johnson, *Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching the Twenty-First Century Listeners* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001). Postmodernism characterizes a rejection of any type of worldview.

distanced from the postmodernist's view of spirituality as "life lived in authentic connection with the inner depths and experiences of one's unique self-in-relation."²³

This disconnect is especially felt among Millennials and emerging adults, who reveal little interest in organized religion when compared to their parents and grandparents.²⁴ They may still hold to the tenets of their faith but are shedding their affiliations with a particular religious organization, uncomfortable with the rigidity displayed toward the Bay Area's increasingly diverse landscape. Those who are dropping their evangelical status are also doing so due to its perceived political representation and the hardline stance it has taken against the recent LGBTQ and gender hot button issues. Evangelicalism is often portrayed as uncompassionate and dogmatic in an environment that decries dogma and rigidity.

Simultaneously, society has become increasingly global and pluralism has become firmly rooted, causing a shift from what many would consider traditional American ideals founded on Christian ideology. As culture wrestles with the implications of competing religious identities, the tenets of evangelicalism come into question as Christians find themselves defending the idea of one God and one truth in a sea of relativity. Objectivity is no longer a primary or an absolute measure of truth as subjectivity and one's experience shapes culture's paradigm.²⁵ Subsequently, the evangelical church is increasingly viewed as one possible option for those seeking religion and irrelevant to the postmodernist's heightened sense of spirituality.

²³ Hiebert, 60.

²⁴ Jean M. Twenge et al., "Generational and Time Period Differences in American Adolescents' Religious Orientation, 1966–2014," *PLOS ONE* 10, no. 5 (May 11, 2015), Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials, EBSCOhost.

²⁵ Hiebert, 60.

Stylistically, whether traditional, contemporary, or observing a liturgical calendar, worship in song is an integral aspect of every evangelical church, although the focus given to it varies from church to church. The megachurch has made its presence felt in America, as well as the Bay Area, and is noted for its contemporary, highly technical, and excellent musical worship.²⁶ Technology is used as a platform to reach even larger audiences as “celebrity” pastors and worship leaders have emerged gaining a worldwide influence. This influence is felt among the individual churchgoer, as well as smaller church bodies as pastors attend conferences filled with megachurch speakers focused on implementing the latest trends and other church-growing strategies. In the church setting, this can easily lead to the churchgoer as a spectator in worship rather than experiencing true community and connection with God in and out of the church building. While online sermons and worship are incredible tools for any Christian, many opt to replace the corporate worship experience with these convenient resources.

A snapshot of many of the facets of evangelicalism in the Bay Area can be observed in the present dynamics at Willow Spring. The faithful older members remain deeply committed participants carrying the weight of the financial obligations, noted for their regular attendance and volunteer work. Young adults are sparse and families with children are often hesitant to fully engage as members of the church.

In an attempt to recognize people’s varying denominational backgrounds and honor the diversity that brings, Willow considers itself an interdenominational rather than a nondenominational congregation. Indeed, there are multiple denominations and streams represented, including Catholic, Episcopalian, Charismatic, Baptist, Presbyterian,

²⁶ Scott Thumma, “Recent Shifts in America’s Largest Protestant Churches: Megachurches 2015 Report” (2015): 20. The megachurch is defined as having 2,000 or more in weekly attendance.

Methodist, and nondenominational, as well as those who have no church background prior to attending Willow. Congregants find commonality in seeking God together through worship, prayer, studying the Word, and doing life together.

WSSC has one main church service on Sunday mornings, which is contemporary in nature, with very little liturgical influence outside of major holy days. Worship in music is also contemporary, with a worship leader, singer/s, and band. A handful of worshipers raise their hands during the singing, and most are responsive when prompted but are otherwise fairly undemonstrative. Congregants delve into the Scriptures together as the Word is taught and applied in the weekly sermon message.

Known for its friendliness, Willow is characterized by sincerely welcoming all who would enter, regardless of background or appearance. Current attendance in the main service varies widely, averaging between sixty to ninety people for regular weekly services and 110–150 for special services around Christmas and Easter. The number of children, ages newborn through elementary ranges from ten to thirty weekly, along with a handful of youth. Most youth in attendance on Sunday mornings also serve by greeting, playing in the Worship band, serving in technical arts, or helping in the children's area. Children stay in service, sitting in front or with their parents until after the worship music when they are released to their class. Other ministries include weekly life and prayer groups, a thriving monthly outreach lunch for seniors, mid-week kids' and youth programs, and an all-church mid-week Bible study, serving to foster a greater sense of connection and growth.

Willow Spring's most devoted attendees are beginning to reveal increased evidence of spiritual transformation in harboring a more passionate pursuit of God,

expressing deeper contentment, and living out their faith outside the church walls.

Although some are reaching out to their friends and neighbors, most visitors come from the church website, rather than from invitations. And despite the presence of dedicated congregants, it is common for those who consider themselves regular attendees to miss two or more services a month due to competing activities and priorities. Challenges have arisen in attempting to move these more casual attendees to a place of deeper commitment in their relationship with the Lord and the church is exploring additional means of stimulating renewal within its body.

Contextual Summary

As the postmodern, pluralistic world has become fully entrenched in society—indeed, many are already declaring the entrance of the post-postmodern world—the evangelical church in the Bay Area is losing much of its widespread influence, especially among the younger generations. In its attempt to establish objective truth and provide evidence for faith, the broader evangelical church has neglected the importance of encountering God in an experiential way, continuing to speak the language of modernity grounded in rationalism and objectivity. This serves to widen the gap with a culture seeking spiritualism and experience, while the church struggles to relevantly communicate the Gospel in a way that can be heard without losing the tenets of its evangelical beliefs. Nestled in the heart of the post-Christian Bay Area, Willow Spring is illustrative of the evangelical church's continuing predicament of attempting to effectively reach younger generations and encourage newer congregants to a deeper engagement with the Lord.

It has become evident that while truth and knowing the reasons for our faith are vital, they are best accompanied by experience, as most—not the least of whom are today’s emerging adults—will otherwise struggle with embracing the reality of that truth. If the evangelical church in the San Francisco Bay Area is to reach younger adults and subsequent generations, we must learn to speak their language. We should retain our core beliefs while simultaneously providing opportunities for Christians and seekers alike to experience the presence of God in holistic ways.

Ministry Journey

My deepest desire has always been to go up the mountain of God, that I might be in the very midst of his presence and glory. This desire is an indelible part of me. It is born out of the grace of God, which has stamped every season of my life, every step of my journey, and who I am today. Grace that reveals the best version of myself meets me when I am in his presence, basking in his glory. “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18).

I grew up in a nurturing and supportive home filled with music. And from the moment I was introduced to Jesus as my Savior and friend, my life was characterized by pursuing music and spending time with him. I had begun singing solos in our church and I loved singing for him and others. Interestingly, we sang hymns every week in church and I can remember reading the music, enjoying the words, and singing the harmonies, but not feeling a strong connection with God through that music. The liturgical structure felt somewhat academic, but I longed to know him with all my heart. My greatest

connection with him was in the privacy of my room or writing songs at the piano where I could pour out my adolescent and teenage heart through my music. I knew he was listening; with me every moment. My heart was captured through the music poured out to God and I knew this was what I was meant to do with my life—“to make God and others smile through my singing,” as I thought of it then.

In my first year of high school, I set my sights on attending Azusa Pacific University, a private Christian school where they had a reputed music program and I knew I could follow the call I felt God had put on my life. But in my senior year, I began to question my faith, my call, and thereby my schooling choice. Enchanted with the notion of attending a highly respected college, I began my college career at Stanford University as a music major. I did well in all my music classes and choir, even receiving the Vocalist of the Year award. Nonetheless, I found myself becoming disenchanted with the music I was performing, my fellow classmates in the department, and even some of my music professors, who also seemed to embrace the worldly pleasures continuing to enthrall me. At the end of that year, I decided to switch my music major to business, as the very thing I had once found so much joy in, making music, had lost its source of joy.

That summer, as I grappled with arguments for and against God’s existence, I also reflected on my childhood and could not deny the reality of him as my constant companion, the source of my joy and hope. I knew my life needed to be reordered to come in line with him and the passion I had delighted in as a child—a passion that was now being renewed—to serve him with my voice. I made the decision to recommit my life to the Lord, leaving Stanford to attend APU the next year. It was there that my love

of making music returned as it was once again ignited by my passion of doing it for the Lord.

After graduation, my husband, Eric—also a music major—and I got married, and moved back to my hometown, and started a family. We found a church that was a great fit for our growing family, and it was there that a cosmic shift occurred, beginning our first Sunday. The worship set, with its simple Maranatha worship choruses, brought me to tears as my heart found the connection to God I’d been previously missing in worship. After a time of volunteering in the worship ministry, a pastor starting a nearby church plant asked Eric and me to be worship leader “missionaries” for six months.

Within three months, Eric was officially on staff as the Worship Pastor and I would officially join him five years later when our youngest entered school. Our motto shaping the church culture was, “To let God love us and love others through us.” Initially, upon hearing this, I struggled with embracing the first half of that statement as I primarily thought our worship was to give love rather than to receive, as Jesus taught, “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. . . . [and] your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37–9). It wasn’t until recently that I was able to more fully embrace that concept of what it meant to be a wholly loved child of God. In hindsight, I believe this philosophy, acting as the gears of the church, helped to create the momentum propelling us from 100 people that first Sunday to 6,000 regular attendees in 10 years as congregants also grasped their identity as loved children of God.

In 2000, we attended the Hillsong conference in Australia and encountered free, Spirit-led worship that transformed my own. Now that I had tasted passionate worship in the Spirit characterized by freedom instead of formality, I only wanted more. We

recognized that Hillsong church had something ours did not, and it was more than the freedom itself. Both churches had access to the same Spirit, but Hillsong pursued his presence unashamedly. I came away longing to explore this further as I acknowledged the need for more of the Spirit but didn't feel free to do so in my current environment.

God expanded my view of worship in the next several years through each subsequent church in which I ministered as I sought to connect people with him in worship. I also began to teach a variety of worship and music classes as an adjunct at a local Christian university, inspiring me to get my Master of Music. It was around that time I heard God calling us to adopt two children internationally, which miraculously my husband and children also said yes to, wholeheartedly embracing this new way of worshiping God. I experienced him in ways I never had before as I followed after what he had called us to in radical faith, in awe of the many miracles he performed, allowing us to bring our two children from Ethiopia home. What began as an act of worship quickly transformed into the biggest blessing of our lives. I shudder to think of what we would have missed had we not said, "Yes."

A few years later, we were ministering at Willow Spring Christian Church in the Bay Area—my husband as the lead pastor and I as the worship pastor. We felt a burden for this church to represent our family-oriented community, but everything we attempted that had worked in our previous churches seemed to fall flat in our new community. I began to ask myself why God wasn't backing us up, wondering if we were doing something wrong, desperate for a deeper experience of him.

I was discouraged on several fronts, in and out of ministry, and questioned how long I should continue as a worship leader. One Friday night, alone in the family room, I

came across a post on Facebook by an old friend, Joanne, who had been healed instantaneously as one man prayed in faith over her. I was staggered by the news, and as I read the comments of others who had also been healed, something shifted inside me. I realized that God was much bigger than I had allowed him to be and if it was true that physical healing was still something he did through normal people, then there were other *charismata* I had also discounted that could be true for today. I began to sob for the next two hours as I repented, telling God that I wanted him for who he really was without my preconceived ideas.

Thus began a journey of seeking him with a new understanding of what was possible in my pursuit of him. That very weekend he brought back the joy of worshipping him with renewed freedom at a Hillsong concert I attended, reminding me of what I had experienced at that conference many years before. The following night, I attended a service that my friend, Joanne was speaking at nearby. It was that night that I received an overwhelming sense of God's presence and love, transforming the way I viewed others, seeing them anew through the lens of that enhanced love. From that time on, I couldn't get enough of God and, whether waking up in the middle of the night or throughout the course of my day, I felt immersed in his love and presence. My identity in him began to be reshaped by who God says I am in his Word, reiterated in my heart—chosen, precious, beloved, heir, seated with him in heavenly places, and so much more. I had been a long-time student of the Bible, but suddenly everything I read came into a greater sense of alignment as I began to experience healings and other *charismata* I had previously only read about. My love for worship returned and I couldn't get enough of worshipping throughout each day. This was in steep contrast to the previous few years as my love for

corporate worship had never ceased, but my private worship had stagnated and listening to worship music had become more of a chore than a joy.

A couple of months later, I attended a Global Awakening conference led by Randy Clark. I resonated with his biblical approach to the Holy Spirit and what was available through him, believing that I had finally discovered the emphasis on the Spirit I yearned for connected with the strong biblical teaching I knew was vital. There, I also began to experience the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit, initially while worshipping and continuing in a powerful encounter with the Lord. God used the experience of his manifest presence, as well as numerous prophecies received that week, to affirm my continued pursuit of intimate worship. From that day forward, I have continued to feel his manifest presence and hear his voice clearer, greatly impacting my effectiveness as a minister and giving me new boldness in worship and prayer. In developing these facets of hearing God and ministering to others, I began to hear God once more invite me to go on another journey, this time pursuing the DMin program as a Randy Clark scholar. New aspects of worship were being unveiled before me relating to intercession, supernatural activity, and revival. I recognized that I had much more to learn and pass on in the hope that others might also experience their own spiritual awakening. Once again, God had my “Yes.”

The Synergy

With this spiritual journey characterized by experiencing God in worship, and the apparent need for the ministry context to personally encounter God, a natural convergence emerges. While a hunger for his transformative presence was regularly

experienced to some degree throughout my journey, the realization of it was deepened as my expectation of what was available through the Holy Spirit increased, with a consequent revelation of his love and presence in worship. As the contextual analysis reveals a need to encounter God in an experiential way, an opportunity presents itself to explore how musical worship can be utilized as a platform to encounter God's presence, especially for those seeking a deeper revelation of him. Consequently, the main focus of the Doctor of Ministry project will be exploring how one can more intimately encounter God in worship to impact revival and transformation in the life and community of the worshiper.

Having personally experienced many dry seasons of worship as well as those typified by encountering God, I acknowledge that one's approach to worship can dramatically influence its subsequent impact on one's life. In undergoing my own spiritual awakening through an encounter with God, I recognize the importance of having a firsthand experience with God for those in the ministry context. As I was also able to discover the significance of acknowledging that God desires to make himself known to us, I hope to assist others to do the same, so that they might become more open to receive God's presence and his accompanying characteristics in worship.

Beyond personal experience, I have been privileged to serve in a wide range of churches, accompanied by varying personalities and worship styles, allowing me to observe congregants from many different streams. Additionally, drawing on the insights gained by years of teaching at an evangelical university assists in comprehending the challenges of an emerging Christian generation and should aid in formulating a means to effectively communicate with potential participants. This combined background affords

me unique insight into how to develop a program designed to facilitate increased engagement with the Holy Spirit in worship.

The musical environment in the U.S. church has shifted as worship music from Renewalist church bodies such as Hillsong, Jesus Culture, and Bethel Church in Redding has become entrenched in mainstream evangelicalism. Songs birthed from these charismatic ministries have made their way into the global Church, and walls which once divided these Renewalist streams from other denominations are coming down. This convergence is resulting in a theological shift as messages contained within these songs begin to permeate the wider body. Accordingly, the greater church is at least declaring the need for the presence of the Holy Spirit in its worship services as articulated in the lyrics of the popular, Grammy-winning song, “Holy Spirit.”

There's nothing worth more that could ever come close
No thing can compare, you're our living hope
Your presence, Lord
I've tasted and seen of the sweetest of loves
Where my heart becomes free and my shame is undone
Your presence, Lord

Holy Spirit, you are welcome here
Come flood this place and fill the atmosphere
Your glory, God, is what our hearts long for
To be overcome by your presence, Lord

Let us become more aware of your presence
Let us experience the glory of your goodness

Having served in ministry through this changing landscape has engendered a unique perspective. Having made a personal shift from declaring the need for the Holy Spirit to learning to better invite and accommodate his presence, I am well-positioned to assist others interested in a similar journey.

The central focus of the ministry project was to develop a model for encountering God in worship promoting Spirit-led transformation, founded on the expectation that God desires to meet with us in worship. As “without faith it is impossible to please him,” God responds to and rewards his people drawing near to him in faith (Heb 11:6). This project proposes that as one approaches worship with the expectation of intimately companioning with the living God, they can also expect to receive what accompanies his manifest presence, including healing for the body, soul and spirit and his empowering grace, love and other attributes necessary for revival and restoration. This model will be designed for applications in both communal and personal times of worship, regardless of denomination or particular music style. Components of the model include teaching and engaging with the Holy Spirit in self-reflection as well as opportunities for examination as one explores and practices methods of expanding one’s ability to give and receive in worship.

It is my belief that greater vulnerability with others and before God as one approaches him in worship results in a greater revelation of God himself. The principle is that as worshipers become more open to God, whether in corporate or private times of worship, they can more effectively give to and receive from him. It is well-known that open lines of communication are important to any healthy relationship, yet many worshipers maintain postures of formality in an effort to acknowledge the holiness of God. Could the opposite be true—that enhanced intimacy in worship leads to an even greater awareness of his holiness as the worshiper receives an enlarged perspective of Yahweh?

This project shows that as one's expectations increase in meeting with God in worship, the worshiper may also experience greater depths of the characteristics accompanying his presence, such as peace, joy, hope, faith, and love. As the worshiper receives these endowments, their hunger for God should intensify, resulting in a desire for more frequent times of worship. Experiencing these traits should help to renew the worshiper's soul, contributing to healthier spiritual well-being.

We will also see that as worshipers bring issues to God that need physical and emotional healing in confident expectation of encountering his presence, they will experience his healing presence. As the presence of the Holy Spirit is manifested to the worshiper, physical and emotional healing may also be realized. If God does not instantaneously heal the worshiper in a singular time of worship, I believe it is consistent to expect that regular times of worship may contribute to a gradual process of healing as the worshiper's faith and overall spiritual well-being increase, however gauging that outcome is outside the scope of this particular project.

Finally, through the project it will be revealed that worship as an intercessory function may lead the worshiper to sense an increased level of effectiveness in crying out to God for themselves or others. As the worshiper's identity as a child of God is strengthened through fixing their gaze on their Father, they can better take hold of their mandate to stand up as his earthly representative. In this way, worship becomes an interactive form of prayer.

Worship and intercession have long been considered necessary for revival—can instituting a practice of intercessory worship impact transformation in one's life? While determining long-term transformation is beyond the scope of this project, it does

postulate that worshipping lends itself to an enlarged perspective of any issue the worshiper is facing. Through worship, one is more apt to view any situation through the lens of God's will, in light of the revelation of his character and goodness experienced in worship. As the worshiper is better aligned with God, they may more effectively intercede for his will to be done on earth, promoting a greater sense of purpose by the worshiper.

Conclusion

When examining some of the cultural conditions, including the state of the evangelical church today, it is apparent that the American church could benefit from a deeper revelation of the presence of God. Although many churches have rejected ritualistic practices of worship in an effort to cultivate the personal relational aspect of life with God, that in itself has become, if not a ritual, a weekly tradition. The younger generations, in particular, view the form of religion on display in the recent cultural wars, rather than seeing compassion, love and solutions for society's ills. While there are many problems indicated here that are bigger than the scope of this project, it is clear that those in and out of the church need to come face to face with the living God in the person of Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

In consideration of the evangelical church's need to experience God along with my background and accompanying recent revelation of God through worship in music, it is appropriate for the ministry project to explore a model for "Encountering God in Musical Worship: An Invitation to Transformation." This doctoral project hypothesizes that participants who are taught to engage in vulnerable and authentic musical worship

with an expectation of encountering the Spirit of the Lord will relay one or more of the following: a heightened awareness of his presence with its accompanying characteristics, such as love, joy, peace, and faith; physical and/or emotional healing; an increased desire to engage in worship; a greater sense of purpose and freedom in worship. In that effort, a model was developed so participants could be taught to increase their expectation of how God desires to reveal himself and have the opportunity to meet with him in ways they perhaps never have before.

In developing the project, it is important to establish a foundation of truth on which worshipers can anticipate meeting the Spirit of God. Thus, biblical truths will be examined to glean what Bible has to say regarding how his people are to worship, with an exegesis of Psalm 149 as an appropriate template. Next, we will consider a historical review of the Welsh Revival of 1904-5 to learn how worshiping in freedom helped to spark a deep hunger for God. Then, a study of the theology of intimate worship will be offered to discover God's plan from the beginning to relate with his people in worship. Finally, how God has designed our bodies to be transformed will be considered through a closer look at neuroplasticity and the neurotheology of worship. Through each of these foundations a picture will be formed validating the grounding of the hypothesis in the Bible, history, theology, and neuroscience.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction: Psalm 149

Worship is one of the main themes running throughout Scripture, indicating the crucial role it plays in the reign of God among his people. Worship is revealed, not merely as an appropriate response to the greatness of God, but as the vehicle by which his power is often displayed allowing his people to partner in accomplishing his purposes. It is through worship that God has historically dwelled among his people.

Stories of victory through worship include the walls of Jericho falling as the people of God lifted up a shout of praise (Josh. 6:1–21), enemies defeated before any blood was shed as worshipers led the armies of God (2 Chron. 2:20), and Paul and Silas freed from their prison cell as they unashamedly sang out their worship (Acts 16:25–26). The Psalms, as a book of songs to God, is filled with expressions of praise to God for his nature, his attributes, and for giving his people victory. It tells a story of faith’s journey in which “at every stage the sanctuary appears to be the place where the victory is accomplished.”¹ The penultimate chapter, Psalm 149, lays a foundation for the reason the people of God as his ambassadors are to worship, how they are to worship, and gives expectations for what their praise of God is accomplishing.

¹ Dragoslava Santrac, “The Psalmists’ Journey and the Sanctuary: A Study in the Sanctuary and the Shape of the Book of Psalms,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 52, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 45, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials, EBSCOhost.

The guiding focus of this exegesis is to examine how this passage informs the main tenets of the hypothesis that participants who are taught to engage in vulnerable and authentic musical worship with an expectation of encountering the Spirit of the Lord will relay one or more of the following: a heightened awareness of his presence with its accompanying characteristics, such as love, joy, peace and faith; physical and/or emotional healing; an increased desire to engage in worship; and a greater sense of purpose and freedom in worship. The case will be presented that Psalm 149 does indeed support these core principles and is an appropriate biblical basis that yields a strong foundation. Standard exegetical process will be utilized including general interpretation, an examination of the immediate and broader literary context, key interactions with other texts, considerations of structure and form, as well as a detailed analysis.

While scholars give significance to Psalm 149's place in the Psalter, there have been differing opinions regarding its current relevance and appropriateness. Many have been uncertain about the validity of the Psalm and its tone of revenge, with some even referring to it as "spiritually valueless," or having a "schrille Dissonanz."² Despite this somewhat slanderous, yet arguably undeserved reputation, Psalm 149's suitability as a model for the worshiping community will be shown through the application of exegetical principles and subsequent theological interpretation relating Psalm 149 with the DMin project.

Psalm 149 can be categorized as a hymn with its identical opening and closing calls to praise and reasons for praise, although "infinitives stating an aim of praise as in

² Willem S Prinsloo, "Psalm 149: Praise Yahweh with Tambourine and Two-Edged Sword," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 109, no. 3 (1997): 395, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials, EBSCOhost.

Ps 149:5–9 are unusual in hymns.”³ No consensus exists on the type of hymn, but according to Willem Prinsloo, most scholars purport that it must have originated and been initially utilized within a cultic situation, although its continued function over time was distanced from that original purpose.⁴ At the time of its writing, the people of Israel would have been facing threatening enemy forces. In this hostile environment, the people are exhorted to come gather and worship their King, the God who formed Israel (vv. 1–2). Israel is to praise him with dancing and music because he takes pleasure in them and is their salvation, not only in the assembly but also in private from a place of rest (vv. 3–5). Their weapons are the “high praises of God” wielded to discipline those in opposition and subjugate the rebel leaders (vv. 6–8). This is an enforcement of the judgment already decreed, which is honor for his godly people (v. 9).

Themes to be developed within the Psalm include: how the people of God are to praise the Lord; the worshiping community as the fulfillment of the Messianic Covenant; and their joyful praise as effective warfare against those in rebellion against God. Psalm 149 lays out a descriptive model for Israel’s worship including their motivation for praise, instructions for worship, and what their worship is accomplishing. Although this may have been originally written and sung by Israel in a cultic situation, its relevance today for the present people of God will be evidenced as the Psalter reveals Israel as the messianic community accomplishing the work of the kingdom of God.

³ Alma Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter: Psalms 146-150 in the Masoretic Text, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Septuagint* (Berlin, DE: De Gruyter, Inc., 2017), 108, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁴ Prinsloo, “Psalm 149,” 406.

Historical and Literary Analysis

When examining the validity of utilizing Psalms to gain clarity on the role of worship, the significance of the book itself is also considered. Inarguably, the Psalter was widely used in ancient Judaism, but its popularity and perceived relevance has also continued throughout Christianity, beginning with its founder. Psalms is the most quoted book of the Old Testament by Jesus himself as recorded in the Gospels.⁵ Its continued use helped to enhance liturgy in the early church through hymns and Scripture readings, often validating “the teachings expressed in what eventually became the New Testament canon.”⁶ As a prophetic book, Psalms served to substantiate “the essential nature of the Son of God and the messianic role of Jesus Christ as the Savior of the human race.”⁷ Martin Luther considered Psalms to be written by the Holy Spirit and taught that its readers should also be inspired by the Holy Spirit in receiving the word.⁸ In his estimation, the psalms are not just for the particular time in which they were written, but can and should be relevant for its readers in each new period in history.⁹

In order to gain a greater understanding of Ps. 149, we consider its place within the Psalter and its final grouping, known as the “Little” or “Concluding Hallel.”¹⁰

⁵ Lee Martin McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon*, Rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub, 1995), 100.

⁶ Quentin F. Wesselschmidt, ed., “Psalms 51–150,” *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, 29 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 8:xxxix, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁷ Wesselschmidt, “Psalms 51–150,” 8:xxxix.

⁸ Kenneth Mtata, Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, and Miriam Rose, eds., *Singing the Songs of the Lord in Foreign Lands: Psalms in Contemporary Lutheran Interpretation; [Second International Hermeneutics Conference, “Towards a Lutheran Hermeneutics on Psalms”]*, Documentation / The Lutheran World Federation 59 (Leipzig, DE: Evang. Verl.-Anst, 2014), 236.

⁹ Mtata, Niebuhr, and Rose, *Singing the Songs*, 236.

¹⁰ Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter*, 1.

Repeated 10 times, the imperative “Hallelujah,” opens each psalm and serves to unite the entire grouping. Inclusive of Pss. 146-150, each “Psalm builds on the theme of the previous one, further developing the theme.”¹¹ Zenger postulates the universal theme of the kingship of God, and the eschatological progression through Pss. 146-150.¹² Others, such as Leuenberger and Ballhorn may not acknowledge that progression throughout the entire Final Hallel, but do recognize God’s kingship throughout, and eschatology in Ps. 149, with “God’s congregation replacing a Davidic messiah, and theocratic rule as the only form of power.”¹³ This thematic emphasis is an echo of the “affirmation of God’s kingship that lies at the theological and editorial heart of the Psalter.”¹⁴

No consensus exists as to the dating of Ps. 149, although it has been widely debated as has the psalm’s specific context. When linked to a specific cultic occasion or historical setting, some argue for a pre-exilic or post-exilic and Maccabean period, while others declare the impossibility of assigning a date to the psalm at all.¹⁵ And while many have recognized an eschatological framework, others point to its battle references and see “a song that is sung on the eve of a battle against the heathen nations, or... a song of triumph sung by a conquering army after celebrating victory.”¹⁶ Goldingay acknowledges that although the reference to the congregation of the godly in the opening seems to

¹¹ Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter*, 4.

¹² Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter*, 6.

¹³ Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter*, 6.

¹⁴ Derek E Wittman, “Let Us Cast off Their Ropes from Us: The Editorial Significance of the Portrayal of Foreign Nations in Psalms 2 and 149,” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Book of Psalms: The Current State of Scholarship*, ed. Nancy L. DeClaissé-Walford (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Lit, 2014), 66, EBSCOhost.

¹⁵ Prinsloo, “Psalm 149,” 398.

¹⁶ Prinsloo, “Psalm 149,” 398.

indicate a worship occasion, no detail is given to indicate a specific setting.¹⁷ Prinsloo presents a compelling argument for placing the origin of the psalm in the post-exilic period due to its frequent handling of other Old Testament texts, but warns that we must resist constraining “it into a predetermined historic or cult *Sitz*, thus forcing the interpretation to adopt a particular perspective.”¹⁸ Furthermore, many have determined that no specific cultic occasion prompted the writing of Ps. 149, instead arguing that “the ideal eschatological Israel” was being anticipated.¹⁹ Prinsloo rightly highlights the role the psalm continued to play in proceeding communities of faith, eventually shedding whatever particular context or cultic connotations that may have existed leaving only the psalm itself.²⁰

Regardless of the specific occasion it may have been written for, Ps. 149 satisfies all the criteria for a hymn with its mandate to praise and the reasons given for praise.²¹ Yet, as Brueggeman points out, the “revenge motif” is “quite unexpected in the hymns.”²² Many struggle with the warlike tones interwoven with praise as the two seem to be strange bedfellows. However, as J. Clinton McCann submits, the “violent imagery” appropriately “locates vengeance within the context of justice.”²³ As a hymn, this is a call

¹⁷ John Goldingay, *Psalms, Volume 3: Psalms 90-150* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 73, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁸ Prinsloo, “Psalm 149,” 406.

¹⁹ Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter*, 98.

²⁰ Prinsloo, “Psalm 149,” 406.

²¹ Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter*, 108.

²² Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*, Augsburg Old Testament studies (n.p.: Augsburg Pub. House, 1984), 166, EBSCOhost.

²³ J. Clinton McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 42.

to praise Israel's King and God over all in the midst of oppression as they prepare to defeat their enemies.

It is partly this perspective of “wrestl[ing] with a world abounding in hostility” that has influenced some scholars' determination of Ps. 149's placement within the Psalter itself.²⁴ Indeed, although the order of the Psalter has been subject to modification throughout its history, many have argued for a relatively consistent—and some would say significant—placement of Psalm 149 at the end of the book.²⁵ Derek Wittman implicates Ps. 149 within the framework of the conclusion of the Psalter, calling it a “strategic location” and part of a hermeneutical lens through which to interpret the entire work.²⁶ Psalm 149 gives hope to those struggling with threatening world forces that their worship of the one true God will subdue those forces and help to establish a new world order.²⁷

In addition to widespread agreement on the classification of Ps. 149 as a hymn, scholars also agree regarding its unity.²⁸ Believed to be written by one author, the psalm reflects cohesive elements with its opening and closing imperatives to praise, the repetition of the preposition “in” in every half-verse and its use of “faithful ones” at the

²⁴ Nancy L. DeClaissé-Walford, *The Shape and Shaping of the Book of Psalms: The Current State of Scholarship*, Society of Biblical Literature: Ancient Israel and Its Literature (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2014), 62, EBSCOhost.

²⁵ No consensus exists regarding a final date of the completed canonical Psalter, although proposed dates include, “after 587 B.C.E. because of the obvious reference to exile in Babylon in Ps 137,” “around 200 B.C.E. on the basis of references to the collection . . . in contemporary Qumran texts,” no later than 200 B.C.E. due to the adoption of “an mt-type psalter” by then, and as late as after the middle of the first century C.E. Wittman, “Let Us Cast off,” 62.

²⁶ Dennis Tucker considers groupings such as Psalms 1–2 and Psalms 146–150 a framework to provide a “hermeneutical horizon” affecting the reader's perspective and subsequent interpretation when considering primacy and recency effects. Wittman, “Let Us Cast off,” 57.

²⁷ DeClaissé-Walford, *The Shape and Shaping*, 62.

²⁸ Anthony R Ceresko, “Psalm 149: Poetry, Themes (Exodus and Conquest), and Social Function,” *Biblica* 67, no. 2 (1986): 178, JSOR Journals, EBSCOhost.

beginning, middle and end of the psalm connecting each section.²⁹ The number seven also serves as unifier as it is the number of times the people are exhorted to praise and the number of “names or designations of Yahweh... [as well as] Israel appear[ing] at various points within the poem.”³⁰

Structurally, the psalm is often divided into two sections, although the placement of the break between the two sections is debated. The first view presents the break between verses 4 and 5, the second between verses 5 and 6, with a small minority, including the NAB, demarcating verse 6a as the end of section one.³¹ Still others promote three sections, such as the New International Version (vv. 1, 2–5, 6–9), as well as an alternative viewpoint positing three verses in each section (vv. 1–3, 4–6, 7–9). While each of these theories hold merit, the most persuasive seems to be Ceresko’s case for a “pivot” verse 5.³² This theory maintains verse 5 acts as a pivot between the first section (vv. 1–4) and the second (vv. 6–9), belonging exclusively to neither but acting as a link between the two.³³ Ceresko points to the placement of “the faithful” in verse 5 at the almost central point of the psalm, sandwiched between its first occurrence in verse 1 and final appearance in verse 9 thereby highlighting its centrality. He also examines “the syllable count... [which] reveals that *kàbôd* “their Glorious One” in this verse stands at the very center of the psalm; 76 syllables precede and 75 follow this word.”³⁴

²⁹ Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter*, 92.

³⁰ Ceresko, “Psalm 149: Poetry,” 178.

³¹ Ceresko, “Psalm 149: Poetry,” 185–7.

³² Ceresko, “Psalm 149: Poetry,” 185–7.

³³ Ceresko, “Psalm 149: Poetry,” 185–7.

³⁴ Ceresko, 185. “Psalm 149: Poetry,” The syllable count is based on the MT.

Additionally, H. Gunkel compellingly calls attention to the “syntactical unity” of verses 5–9 more recently acknowledged by translations including the Jewish Publication Society and the Chicago Bible which designate verses 5–9 as one sentence.³⁵

Psalms 149 is also often noted for its intertextual references and similar themes to other books in the OT, most notably Pss. 2, 96 and 98 and Isa. 40–66.³⁶ Brodersen comments on the significance of these references to a proper interpretation of the psalm, in part due to the specific inclusion of “written” in verse 9a, generally considered a reference to written texts. It is these same references that are also used to contend for a more eschatological rather than violent interpretive approach to the psalm.³⁷ Each of these passages (Pss. 96, 98, 149, and Isa. 42) feature the salvation of God, the judgment of the nations, and along with justice the call for a new song to be sung to Yahweh. The reign of God as king over the nations in place of an earthly king is also indicated by the new song reference.³⁸

God’s sovereignty is further emphasized when comparing Ps. 149 as the penultimate book to its mirror, Ps. 2. Derek Wittman posits that Ps. 149 serves to provide a proper finish as the “faithful” complete the work of establishing the sovereignty of God over all.³⁹ The Davidic figure prominent in Ps. 2 is noticeably absent in Ps. 149 as a sort of transference, or “‘democratization’ of kingship” from the Davidic figure to the whole

³⁵ Ceresko, “Psalm 149: Poetry,” 185–7.

³⁶ Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter*, 36.

³⁷ Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter*, 36.

³⁸ Nancy L DeClaissé-Walford, Rolf A Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2014), 785.

³⁹ Wittman, “Let Us Cast off,” 57.

people is represented.⁴⁰ While not all scholars are in agreement with this eschatological framework, the correlations between the two psalms are difficult to miss. Both contain overlapping references to peoples, iron materials including their usage in binding nations, foreign kings and divine sovereignty, and include language referencing Zion and kingship.⁴¹

Translation of Psalm 149

1 Praise Yah.

Sing for Yhwh a new song,
his praise in the congregation of the committed.
2 Israel is to rejoice in its maker;
the children of Zion— they are to joy in their king.
3 They are to praise his name with dancing,
with tambourine and lyre they are to make music for him.
4 Because Yhwh delights in his people,
he will adorn the weak with deliverance.
5 The committed are to exult in their honor,
they are to resound on their beds,
6 Acclamations of God in their mouth
and a two-edged sword in their hand,
7 To execute redress among the nations,
rebukes among the countries,
8 To bind their kings with shackles,
their nobles with iron chains,
9 To execute among them the decision put into writing:
this will be glory for all his committed people.

Praise Yah.⁴²

⁴⁰ Wittman, “Let Us Cast off,” 57.

⁴¹ Wittman, “Let Us Cast off,” 57.

⁴² Goldingay’s translation is based on the Masoretic Text from the Leningrad Codex including some “alternative renderings” derived from the LXX or other versions reflecting varying Hebrew traditions. Goldingay, *Psalms, Volume 3*, 737.

How the People of God Are to Praise the LORD

Translated from the Hebrew *halluyah*, this stock phrase begins and ends the psalm and can be broken into the primitive roots *halal* meaning to shine, radiate or praise and *Yah*, the name of the God of Israel.⁴³ *Halal* frequently connotes acting insanely or going mad in the boasting suggesting exuberance rather than a quiet, reserved act.⁴⁴ Indeed, our praise to God is not just songs to be sung but a life lived in praise from his light emanating from within.⁴⁵ The very word implies a sense of extravagance as one offers to Yahweh the highest version of themselves rooted in their recognition of who he is and their dependence on him.

Israel is exhorted to not just sing, but to “Sing for Yhwh a new song,” which is the first of several instructions enumerating how his people are to praise. Throughout the Old Testament, God was praised with new songs as his people were delivered from threatening forces and they anticipated his righteous judgment of the nations.⁴⁶ The instruction to sing a “new song,” also given in Pss. 96 and 98 does not simply “indicate a song tune that has never been heard before, but rather refers to the beginning of a new era,

⁴³ Prinsloo, “Psalm 149,” 400.

⁴⁴ Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance, Updated Edition: Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries* (Anaheim, CA: Foundation Publications, Inc., 1998), s.v. “1984b.”

⁴⁵ According to Strong’s dictionary *hā·lāl* is also to “have bright or clear light be visible from a source.” James Swanson, *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages w/ Semantic Domains: Hebrew (OT)* (Oak Harbor, [WA?]: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), s.v. “2145.”

⁴⁶ Richard Duane Patterson, “Singing the New Song: An Examination of Psalms 33, 96, 98, and 149,” *Bibliotheca sacra* 164, no. 656 (October 2007): 432, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials, EBSCOhost.

a new epoch in history.”⁴⁷ These new songs point to a new reign, not by an earthly king, but by the King himself, the God of Israel.⁴⁸

It is in this context of the new work being foretold that the psalmist exhorts the people of God to praise him with one another. Verse 1 is often translated as “saints” or “the godly” as “the ones faithful to God as a group.”⁴⁹ Prinsloo points out that the emphasis is on what is sung—the new song—and where it is sung, rather than the command itself. But that doesn’t limit worship to a physical location such as the confines of the temple or church, as later verses imply worship outside of the temple.⁵⁰ Neither does it limit worship to a strictly public gathering as verse 5 hints at a personal or private space. Yet, praise in this corporate setting is clearly called for and the tone is set for it to be done with exuberance, filled with joy, dancing, and loud instrumentation as the people unashamedly revel in their King.

The king who is the faithful’s “maker” is not simply the Creator of the universe, but specifically the one who made and is making Israel. Brodersen expounds that the grammar reflects a constant activity being performed by Yahweh, the king of Israel, who is their justice and help.⁵¹ This is confirmed in Rom. 11 as God is continuing to build his nation, grafting in Gentiles who come to him by faith.⁵² Thus Israel in this context is no

⁴⁷ Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 924.

⁴⁸ DeClaissé-Walford, *The Book of Psalms*, 785.

⁴⁹ Swanson, *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, s.v. “2883.”

⁵⁰ Goldingay, *Psalms, Volume 3*, 739.

⁵¹ Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter*, 100.

⁵² In Rom 11:13–24 Paul likens Gentiles to a wild olive shoot, who because of their faith are being grafted into Israel, the olive tree. Likewise, those Israelites without faith have been cut off from their own tree until the time when they can be grafted back in if they let go of unbelief.

longer confined to the physical nation or original people group, but includes all who by faith have been adopted into the family of God.⁵³

The concept of Israel as family is reinforced as they are referred to as “children of Zion” who are “to joy in their king.” This is not a far-off God one is called to worship, but a king who has formed Israel in order to care for them ruling his government from Zion, a place known as “the seat of God’s reign.”⁵⁴ Zion, the name of a physical mountain in SE Jerusalem is often mentioned in connection with the covenant of Israel.⁵⁵ Other Old Testament references, including Isa. 40–55, refer to Israel as the “children of Zion,” a phrase that has been called “a term of endearment that recognizes the way these children have been devastated and desolate; it declares that they are now going to be able to rejoice.”⁵⁶ Verse 2 reminds the reader that Israel, the people designed by God with full rights of inheritance as his children, has great reason to rejoice in him and sets the tone for the rest of the psalm as the psalmist describes how they are to rejoice and what their exultation is accomplishing.

Israel is instructed to dance and make music, a common cultic activity for not just ancient Israel but the surrounding nations as well.⁵⁷ Great military victories were often celebrated with dancing, “a spontaneous response to a supernatural triumph.”⁵⁸ When

⁵³ Galatians 3:29, “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

⁵⁴ Wittman, “Let Us Cast off,” 56.

⁵⁵ Swanson, *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, s.v. “7482.”

⁵⁶ Goldingay, *Psalms, Volume 3*, 739.

⁵⁷ DeClaissé-Walford, *The Book of Psalms*, 785.

⁵⁸ Steven Lawson, “Psalms 76–150,” *Holman Old Testament Commentary*, 20 vols, ed. Max Anders (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2006), 12:368, ProQuest Ebook Central.

bringing the ark of the covenant in to Jerusalem, 2 Sam. 6:14 describes David dancing “before the LORD with all his might.” At the same event, 1 Chron. 15:1–29 tells of David appointing musicians to accompany the procession of the ark into the tabernacle, instructing the singers to “play loudly on musical instruments . . . to raise sounds of joy” (16). The people did indeed praise Yahweh through dancing and singing, unashamedly and with abandon, so much so that David’s wife despised his revelry, perhaps thinking it unkingly. This exuberant, unself-conscious and unabashed celebratory worship marks the kind of rejoicing the psalmist exhorts the people of God to engage in.

Set within this context of how the worshipers are to praise, the psalmist gives the twofold foundational basis for rejoicing. First, it is Yahweh who initially takes pleasure in those who are his. Incredibly, he is the one who first delights in his people giving them cause to worship. Rather than simply demanding adoration as is his due, the people are urged to reciprocate the delight of Yahweh. This mutual delight points to relationship and honor in recognizing the role of each. Second, our reason to praise lies in the delivering action the Lord performs as he adorns the humble who are bowed low before him. The original Hebrew *pā’ar*, translated “adorns” is borrowed from Egyptian, meaning “‘headdress, head wrap’ and is used to describe the head coverings of upper class women of Jerusalem in Isa. 3:20; of priests in Exod. 39:28 and Ezek. 44:18; and of a bridegroom in Isa. 61:10,” the latter giving an illustrative example of being adorned by Yahweh.⁵⁹

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord;
 my soul shall exult in my God,
 for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;
 he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
 as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress,
 and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

⁵⁹ DeClaissé-Walford, *The Book of Psalms*, 785.

Often translated “beautifies,” “crowns” or “glorifies,” according to Brodersen this participle verb form describes an action in the present.⁶⁰ This interpretation is in contrast to the alternate rendering translated above as “will adorn,” anticipating an action in the future.⁶¹ Spurgeon points out that this beautification is done for “‘the meek with salvation,’ ‘the afflicted with deliverance’ or... ‘the meek with victory’; each of these readings gives a new shade of meaning.”⁶² Whether an ongoing action or a near deliverance, the imagery reflects a people of God being suitably prepared to dwell in his presence—a holy people for a holy God.

Salvation in contemporary Christianity is viewed in a primarily eternal context but in the world of the original readers of the Psalter it was understood that “Yahweh was the healer of his people to whom they should readily come for deliverance.”⁶³ Michael Brown contends that sickness was viewed within the context of Yahweh’s wrath against the transgressor. The help needed was immediate and quite practical as those experiencing afflictions were shunned from communal life leaving them desperate for Yahweh’s salvation.⁶⁴ The Lord was also the one the community looked to for victory and deliverance from their enemies as an oppressed people. The humble, or “afflicted” as it can also be translated, can be assured that the salvation Yahweh brings is an ongoing activity as seen in Isa. 51:8, “but my righteousness will be forever, and my salvation to

⁶⁰ Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter*, 100.

⁶¹ Goldingay, *Psalms, Volume 3*, 740.

⁶² Charles H. Spurgeon, *Psalms, Volume 2*, ed. Alister McGrath and J. I. Packer, The Crossway Classic Commentaries (n.p.: Crossway, 1993), 324, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁶³ Michael L. Brown, *Israel’s Divine Healer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1995), 124.

⁶⁴ M. Brown, *Israel’s Divine Healer*, 133.

all generations.” The implication is that those needing help who are, in posture or praise, humble before Yahweh can expect help, victory and salvation.⁶⁵

The hinge point and central verse of the psalm continues the exhortation of how to praise as the godly are to “exult in glory [and] sing for joy on their beds.” The verb “exulting” is not a common one, and while it can refer to joy in Yahweh, it is not strictly used for temple worship. In Ps. 94:3 it describes the attitude of Israel’s aggressors as they oppress the innocent and boast in their conquests, a clear contrast to the people of God exulting “in glory” or “in their honor.” This is in keeping with the English translation of the word “exult” meaning “to show or feel triumphant elation,” derived from the Latin *exultare*, to “leap up.”⁶⁶ Regardless of outward physical expression, this is a strong emotion conveying an awareness of victory.

Whose glory, *kābôd* they are to exult in is debated as it can be interpreted to belong either to God or humans. Brodersen enumerates that “in glory,” also translated “in honour” has the same root as “their honoured ones” (translated “nobles” above) in verse 8b, both referring to people rather than God.⁶⁷ Michael Barré has compared verse 5 with similar texts found in Hos. 7:14a and Ps. 4:5, each ending with “on their/your bed/s” preceded by “heart/s” in both texts and “glory” in our passage. He explains that, according to S. Gevitz, *kābôd* in the biblical Hebrew “is a homonym... meaning ‘glory’ ... referring to a front or interior part of the body and by extension denoting ‘the self.’” Correspondingly, Barré supports the translation to be “within (one)self” due to the

⁶⁵ Lawson, *Holman Old Testament Commentary*, 12:368.

⁶⁶ Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds., *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004), s.v. “exult.”

⁶⁷ Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter*, 92.

parallel nature of the texts. In contrast, A.R. Ceresko contends that *kābôd* in Ps. 149 “is a divine epithet, ‘the Glorious One’, the sixth of seven such epithets in the poem.”

Nevertheless, Barré convincingly considers it unnecessary to choose one over the other as the term appears to be an example of “poetic ambivalence,” determining the best interpretation is both “in the Glorious One” *and also* “in (them)selves” alternatively stated “within themselves.”⁶⁸ This seemingly paradoxical perspective appears to resolve the interpretive difficulties of choosing one over the other allowing both to inform our greater understanding of how and in whom we are to exult. Thus, an appropriate translation would be “Let the faithful rejoice within themselves/in the “Glorious One, let them shout for joy upon their beds.”⁶⁹

In contrast to the public assembly, it is now in the privacy of the bed chamber that the people are exhorted to worship. This language has also led to many differing interpretations with some scholars even calling for “a text-critical change” yet with no “convincing reasons” for the change.⁷⁰ Those who maintain the original reading subscribe to varying perspectives: a place of respite after the battlefield, the bedroom as the “proper place for the expression of emotions most deeply felt,” specific cultic situations utilizing divans as a part of sacrificial feasts, “upon their places of prostration,” a private setting rather than public, and eschatological readings where the beds are actually referring to graves.⁷¹ Brodersen also contributes, “beds as private places for meditation,” supported

⁶⁸ Michael L Barré, “Hearts, Beds, and Repentance in Psalm 4,5 and Hosea 7,14,” *Biblica* 76, no. 1 (1995): 54, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials, EBSCOhost.

⁶⁹ Barré, “Hearts, Beds, and Repentance,” 54.

⁷⁰ Prinsloo, “Psalm 149,” 402.

⁷¹ Prinsloo, “Psalm 149,” 402.

by intertextual references, although she struggles with the resulting conclusion of the psalm jumping from public worship to private and back to public again at the end.⁷²

Could the psalmist be emphasizing the importance of worship in both settings?

According to the Old Testament, it was in the bed chamber that actions needing privacy and secrecy occurred. Activities such as plotting (Ps. 36:4), weeping (Ps. 6:6), intimacy and even repentance (I Kings 21:27) are all noted to happen in the bedroom. Barré notes that these are in contrast to the rejoicing and grieving that are sanctioned and sometimes commanded to be public spectacles. In these cases, demonstrations of mourning and repentance were not natural outpourings of feelings but were expected ritualistic actions as were designated times of rejoicing. Barré expounds that “the references to interiority (“in [one’s] heart/self”) and privacy (“on [one’s] bed”) indicate that what is implied in this verse is spontaneous, personal joy experienced by each individual in contradistinction to the public, “ritual” exultation alluded to in V. 1.”⁷³

It is in this place of intimate and sincere rest that Israel is to present “high praises... and two-edged swords,” the last instruction comprising how we are to praise. The Hebrew word *romam* translated “high praise” is only used one other time in the Bible, Ps. 66:17. The supplicant who’s giving the Lord his high praise references a sincerity that has compelled God to listen to their cries. Some translators render *romam*, “glorification.”⁷⁴ This high praise is not simply lip service, but a sincere

⁷² Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter*, 102. Hosea 7:14, Psalm 4:5 and Micah 2:1 according to LXX.

⁷³ Barré, “Hearts, Beds, and Repentance,” 54.

⁷⁴ Robert G. Bratcher and William D. Reymann, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Book of Psalms* (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1991), 572.

acknowledgement of the mightiness of the Lord above all others which helps to establish his rule and bring him glory.

These cries of glorification come from the *garon*, “throat” of the godly. Throats in the Old Testament are often associated with rebellion (Isa. 3:16; Jer. 2:25; Ps. 5:10, 115:7) or being lifted up against rebellion (Isa. 58:1; Ps. 149:6). One other usage in Ezek. 16:11 speaks of the Lord adorning Israel with a chain around the neck/throat, a sign of honor. As the godly in verse 4 have been adorned by God with salvation, they now lift their necks to sincerely exalt Yahweh. To those who would lift their necks in haughtiness and rebellion, the people of God reveal their allegiance as they raise their own adorned throats, filled with songs of exaltation and “two-edged swords” in the hand.

Although many interpretive variations exist as to whether the sword is meant to be (v. 1) an actual sword wielded in battle or as an expression of “a cultic celebration of an eschatological victory,” or (v. 2) a metaphor of speech with the power of a sword, the violent imagery is apparent.⁷⁵ Those who have taken the sword to be a literal weapon in the hand have struggled with that imagery within the context of the bedroom causing them to seek alternate renderings of the setting altogether. Furthermore, the literal “sword of mouths in the hand,” bringing to mind imagery whereby one holds a sword shaped as a mouth has led most translators to modify the phrase to “two-edged swords in their hands.” As these modifications require text critical changes, is it possible to find a congruent interpretation with the text as written?

Looking beyond Ps. 149 to intertextual usages of “two-edged swords” sheds light on its meaning in our text. Whether in Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek, the literal, “sword of

⁷⁵ Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter*, 103.

mouths,” is utilized in five other occurrences in both the Old and New Testaments.⁷⁶

According to Joshua Berman, each instance is “in nearly exclusive fashion... a metaphor for the potency of speech... always bear[ing] metaphorical or figurative meaning pertaining to orality.”⁷⁷ In addition to the exact phrase, similar biblical references abound involving the tongue or words likened to a sword (Ps 55:21, 57:4; Isa. 49:2; Eph. 6:17). Including intertextual references that utilize both identical and similar phrases, it is primarily the word of God (Heb. 4:12; Eph. 6:7), the mouth of the Son of Man (Rev. 1:16, 2:12, 2:16) and Servant of the Lord (Isa. 49:2) that is pictured as a sword. In fact, some have understood the Son of Man’s “two-mouthed sword... to be the potent and lethal word of God, as found in Hos. vi 5 and Is. xi 4.”⁷⁸ Berman concludes that “swords were expressed through oral imagery, then, not because at some point the sword, or its blade physically resembled a mouth in form, but because functionally, it lacerates, as does a mouth.”⁷⁹

To bring further clarity on this phrase translated by Brodersen as “high praises of God in their throats and a sword of two mouths in their hand” we explore whether the second phrase is independent of, or dependent upon the first.⁸⁰ While the phrases are often translated side by side, Gerald Janzen points out that the particular biblical Hebrew conjunction used here is considered an “all-purpose conjunction.” One of its purposes is

⁷⁶ Joshua A. Berman, “The ‘Sword of Mouths’ (Jud. iii 16; Ps. Cxlix 6; Prov. v 4): A Metaphor and Its Ancient Near Eastern Context,” *Vetus Testamentum* 52, no. 3 (2002): 292. Prov. 5:4; Heb. 4:12; Rev. 1:16; 2:12; 2:16.

⁷⁷ Berman, “The ‘Sword of Mouths,’” 293.

⁷⁸ Berman, “The ‘Sword of Mouths,’” 297.

⁷⁹ Berman, “The ‘Sword of Mouths,’” 299.

⁸⁰ Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter*, 87.

as a *vav explications* to further explicate or elaborate on the first phrase, building on rather than merely being independent of it. If indeed this conjunction is acting to explicate, “then we have a deliciously subversive interplay between the two verse-halves: ‘high praises in the throat’ as a ‘two-mouthed sword in the hand.’”⁸¹ This would suggest that the praises of God wielded by his people have a sword-like effect consistent with other intertextual references linking the power of the word of God with a sword.

The Worshiping Community as the fulfillment of the Messianic Covenant

David Mitchell suggests an “eschatological programme” of the Psalter as a whole founded on evidence suggesting deliberate ordering of the book, “intended to represent eschatological events,” and a “messianic agenda.”⁸² He bases this theory on five pillars including a final redaction that was assembled during the second-temple history in which “messianic expectation dominates.” He also names both Jewish and Christian tradition in which eschatological interpretation of the Psalms was normative from biblical times up to the nineteenth century.⁸³ With this framework in mind, the penultimate Psalm resounds with messianic echoes in which the people of Yahweh are given the task of carrying out God’s justice.

⁸¹ J Gerald Janzen, “The High Praises of God as a Two-Mouthed Sword: Psalm 149 in Canonical Context,” *Canadian-American Theological Review* 5, no. 2 (2016): 58–59, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials, EBSCOhost.

⁸² David C Mitchell, “Lord, Remember David: G H Wilson and the Message of the Psalter,” *Vetus testamentum* 56, no. 4 (2006): 528–529, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials, EBSCOhost.

⁸³ Mitchell, “Lord, Remember David,” 528–529. The first three pillars are (1) the royal psalms refer to a Davidic figure yet to come as the house of David was already in eclipse, (2) many other psalms are eschatological in tone, (3) each psalm bearing the name of David, Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and Moses must be future-predictive tense in nature as each of these figures were considered prophets.

Many scholars concur that Ps. 149 acknowledges a shift having occurred whereby the people of God are now taking the role of the Davidic messiah in Psalm 2.⁸⁴ Sometimes referred to as a “democratization” of kingship, it is now the “faithful” who are to “concretely implement God’s sovereignty in the world, a task Ps. 2 assigns to the monarchy.”⁸⁵ H.G.M Williamson outlines the elements common to both Psalms which are indicative of this shift relating to what appear to be national concerns, concluding that Ps. 149 substitutes the people of God in performing the duties of the king named in the second Psalm.⁸⁶

Additionally, “sing to YHWH a new song” could indicate an eschatological context with its connections to Pss. 96 and 98, as well as Isa. 42:10.⁸⁷ It is this new song that is also sung in the apostle John’s apocalyptic vision by the twenty-four elders in response to the work of the Lamb of God who not only redeemed people from every tribe, but made them a kingdom unto God who will reign on the earth (Rev. 5:9–10). Noted as an echo of Pss. 98 and 149, Ladd concludes that “a new song is sung because the new redeemed order of God’s Kingdom is about to be inaugurated.”⁸⁸ In Isa. 42, John Oswalt

⁸⁴ Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter*, 6.

⁸⁵ Wittman, “Let Us Cast off,” 57.

⁸⁶ “In Ps 2:9 the promise to the king is that he will break the power of the nations with a ‘rod of iron’ (בשבט ברזל) whilst in Ps 149:8, the nobles of the nations are to be bound in ‘chains of iron’ (בכבלי ברזל). And just as Ps 149:2 begins with a call to the children of Zion ‘to rejoice’ in God who is their King (בני־ציון יגילו במלכם) so Ps 2 ends with a call to the people to ‘rejoice with fear’ (וגילו ברעדה), also using גיל. God’s judgement is over all the nations of the world (Pss 2:1–3 and 149:7, 9) and they are warned that it will come upon them (Pss 2:10 and 149:8). In each psalm, by contrast, Zion is explicitly referred to as inheriting God’s promises (Pss 2:6 and 149:2).” Iain W. Provan and Mark J. Boda, eds., *Let Us Go up to Zion: Essays in Honour of H.G.M. Williamson on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum: v. 153 (Brill, 2012), 387, EBSCOhost.

⁸⁷ Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter*, 99.

⁸⁸ George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1972), 90.

observes that the new song is the prophet's response to the salvific justice of God available to all creation through the Servant "in a way previously unheard of" implicating a deliverance that is eventually worldwide. Astounded by the magnitude of the deliverance, the prophet calls on all the earth to join him in his song of joyous praise.⁸⁹

Matthew's gospel reveals that Isaiah's prophecy was looking ahead to Jesus as the Servant who will not cease until justice has been delivered upon the entire earth.⁹⁰ According to Richard Patterson, the correlation between Isa. 42 and Ps. 149 beginning with the new song, "reveals that the people of God (Israel) have been moved from the position of needing God's justice to participating in bringing God's justice to other peoples."⁹¹ This assessment is in accord with Williamson's assertion that the role of the servant being completed in Jesus is too restrictive of an outlook from a predictive prophetic standpoint. Alternatively, he claims "that Jesus fulfils, but does not thereby exhaust the prophecy," as the church now completes the role once occupied by the king, initially realized in Jesus.⁹² Janzen additionally points out that when Ps. 149 is viewed in light of the Servant figure in Deutero-Isaiah, the Davidic covenant incorporates "the whole messianic community, commissioned to the testifying task originally invested in the Davidic King."⁹³

The Church, as the continuation of Jesus, is now in position to partner with God in bringing his justice throughout the whole earth, accomplished through their service of

⁸⁹ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 123.

⁹⁰ Matt: 12:15–29 quotes the first four verses of Isaiah 42 expounding on Jesus bringing the kingdom of God.

⁹¹ Patterson, "Singing the New Song," 432.

⁹² Provan and Boda, *Let Us Go up to Zion*, 149.

⁹³ Janzen, "The High Praises of God," 66.

worship.⁹⁴ This is evidenced in the new song of Ps. 149 signifying a new era in which God's kingdom is being ushered in, in part through the worship of the King by his citizens already belonging to his kingdom—the Church. In this sense, Ps. 149 could be considered an inaugurated eschatological poem as the faithful partner with Yahweh to bring in greater measures of his kingdom on the earth until the time of its ultimate and complete consummation. Accordingly, worship is not merely an action whereby the Lord is honored and acknowledged for his greatness. Psalm 149 emphasizes that praising itself is an effective weapon wielded by the community of the Messiah which serves to realize God's sovereignty over all the world.⁹⁵

Joyful Praise as Warfare

As the community of God lifts up joyful praise, warfare against the enemies of God ensues. According to Ps. 149, their praise effectually executes a progression beginning with vengeance, followed by chastisement and ending with the judgment of nations, peoples, kings and nobles. Many struggle with the idea of praise connected with vengeance, or revenge as it is sometimes translated, especially as the Old Testament reiterates frequently that vengeance belongs to Yahweh, not the people.⁹⁶ However, it is not our vengeance that is to be carried out as a visceral or hateful response, but God's restoration of "justice where the regular legal processes were not competent or had failed,"

⁹⁴ Patterson, "Singing the New Song," 432.

⁹⁵ Wittman, "Let Us Cast off," 57.

⁹⁶ DeClaissé-Walford, *The Book of Psalms*, 786. See Deut. 32:35–36; Jer. 46:10; Pss. 94:1; 99:8.

as it was viewed throughout the Old Testament.⁹⁷ This is to be a means of correcting and rebuking rather than harming in order to help the people “see the truth about their position in the world and before Yhwh.”⁹⁸ Enacting this justice of God is given to the faithful ones of God as *hādār*, translated “splendor, honor, or glory,” and usually referring to the “splendor of God and the kings of ancient Israel”—further evidence “suggesting that the responsibilities and benefits of kingship—whether divine or earthly—now belong to the *hesed* ones of God.”⁹⁹

Brodersen summarizes three differing interpretations on these seemingly problematic verses: (1) the faithful are to physically destroy all nations and peoples in opposition to God; (2) the nations’ leaders are to be bound, and possibly the people so they may be led to worship Yahweh; (3) only the leaders and rulers of nations are bound and the people are not restrained. She points out that the first is unlikely based on grammatical and poetic considerations alone and that a metaphorical sword is assumed in the latter two.¹⁰⁰ The metaphorical sword also seems more likely as it is to be brandished while the worshiper is on their bed and a sword is unnecessary for binding.¹⁰¹

The worshipers wielding their praise sword—the faithful, children of Zion belonging to the king—have been made very aware of their identity as it is continually reinforced in Ps. 149. The “committed” or “faithful” are introduced at the beginning, reiterated in the middle and again at the end of the psalm where it is stated that they are

⁹⁷ DeClaissé-Walford, *The Book of Psalms*, 786.

⁹⁸ Goldingay, *Psalms, Volume 3*, 742.

⁹⁹ DeClaissé-Walford, *The Book of Psalms*, 786.

¹⁰⁰ Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter*, 105–6.

¹⁰¹ Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter*, 105–6.

his. In fact, belonging to Yahweh, their maker and king is the reason for their rejoicing (v. 2). He is not only the one who made them and claims them for himself, he delights in and adorns them in coming to their aid (v. 4). Who they are in him is an honor which is reason to exult and sing/shout for joy (v. 5). Franz Delitzsch addresses this when he writes, “The people... have again, in their God, attained to a lofty self-consciousness, the consciousness of their destiny, viz., to subjugate the whole world of nations to the God of Israel.”¹⁰² It is in part the people’s identity as belonging to God which spurs them to praise and rejoice and enables them to be effective praise warriors.

In contrast to the congregation, whose identity is found in being the people of God, the nations and peoples who are to be chastised do not belong to God. According to the Masoretic Text (MT), what is often translated “punishments on the peoples” is literally “punishments non-peoples.”¹⁰³ Due to grammatical problems, translators have opted to modify “non” to “on” or “among.” However, Barbiero and Pavan have shown the correlation to other passages utilizing the same mystifying word combination and given a plausible solution involving a “semantic game” keeping the original text intact.¹⁰⁴ They conclude the authors structured the grammar to suggest an alternative reading so

¹⁰² Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, “Psalms,” *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10 vols (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 5:856.

¹⁰³ Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter*, 105. This is specifically in the Codex L and Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS).

¹⁰⁴ Gianni Barbiero and Marco Pavan, “Ps 44,15; 57,10; 108,4; 149,7: Bl’mym [Hebrew Characters] or Bl-’mym [Hebrew Characters]?,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 124, no. 4 (2012): 604–5, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials, EBSCOhost. They argue the wording to be purposeful as it also occurs in Pss. 44:15; 57:10 and 108:4 and points to earlier texts, Deut. 32:21 and Hos. 1:9,10; 2:23, translated “not My people” (NASB).

that “among the peoples” could also be “(among) the non-peoples.”¹⁰⁵ Deuteronomy 32:21 contains a similar concept indicating a compelling perspective.

They have made Me jealous with *what* is not God;
 They have provoked Me to anger with their ^bidols.
 So I will make them jealous with *those who* are not a people;
 I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation (NASB)

Here, the people notably have no identity, except as a “foolish nation,” contrasted with those belonging to God, which has a marked parallel with our passage.

The “punishments” (תוֹכָחָה) on these “non-peoples” are meant as a correction in order to bring the people to a right understanding of the sovereignty of Yahweh. The people of God are actually involved in the correcting in order to “put them in their place, to chastise them for their attitudes and get them to see the truth about their position in the world and before Yhwh.”¹⁰⁶ Israel itself is familiar with being punished by God as a means of correction. The book of Hosea recounts Israel who is called by Yahweh “Not My People” (Hos. 1:9) because of their rebellion, punished until the Lord “allure[s] her” (v. 2:14), has mercy and says to her, “‘You are my people’; and he shall say, ‘You are my God’” (v. 2:23). Punishment to bring correction is also highlighted in Prov. 3:11–12, which reminds us to “not despise the LORD’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves.” The end goal is acknowledged in Ps. 150, which points to a future when all people are to bow before the LORD in praise as they acknowledge his sovereignty.

As a further means of encouraging all people to worship Yahweh, the faithful rejoice in him so that kings and nobles are bound. Acknowledging that swords are not

¹⁰⁵ Barbiero and Pavan, “Ps 44,15; 57,10,” 604–5.

¹⁰⁶ Goldingay, *Psalms, Volume 3*, 742.

used to bind, Janzen comments that the binding “may well be figurative, a form of non-violent ‘restraint’ analogous to the ‘bulwark’ in Ps. 8 that is ‘founded’ in the mouths of ‘infants’ and ‘sucklings’ . . . to render the aggression of the enemy ineffectual or bring it to a standstill.”¹⁰⁷ This theme is paralleled in Isaiah as Goldingay acknowledges that the “account of the way this redress and rebuke will be administered continues to follow the promises of Isa. 40–55. Those chapters speak of kings being put in their place; of people coming to Israel in shackles (Isa. 45:14).”¹⁰⁸

Psalm 149 within the New Covenant

When viewing Ps. 149 through the lens of the New Testament, which may lead to a greater holistic interpretation, it is two separate kingdoms that appear to be contrasted—the kingdom of God and the kingdom of those who oppose him. Jesus addresses both kingdoms in Matt. 12:22–30 when responding to the Pharisees’ accusation that he cast out demons by the power of Beelzebul. He teaches that it is only by the Spirit of God that he casts out demons conveying that “the kingdom of God has come upon you” (v. 28). Jesus likens this to first needing to bind the “strong man” in order to “plunder his house” (v. 29). This speaks of restricting the oppositional leadership in order to take what is in the strongman’s house, which is a metaphor for beginning to take back a world in the grip of Satan.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Janzen, “The High Praises of God,” 61.

¹⁰⁸ Janzen, “The High Praises of God,” 61.

¹⁰⁹ John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, vol. 1, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 502.

Certainly, the only effective weapons against the kingdoms of this world are those wielded in the Spirit; the same Spirit of God empowering Jesus' ministry. Paul states in Eph. 6:12: "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." Spurgeon writes, "At this hour, under the gentler dispensation of grace, we wrestle not with flesh and blood; yet is our warfare none the less stern... and in that warfare his servants will play their parts."¹¹⁰ It is not nobles and kings in the earthly realm we contend with but those unseen authorities and principalities holding this world in bondage. Just as "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (v. 17) is to be the weapon against these "cosmic powers," (v. 12) so "the acclamations of God" (Ps. 149:6) act as two-edged swords in his people's hands to "bind their kings... [and] their nobles" (v. 8) in order that those held hostage to the kingdoms of this world might be free.

Finally, the faithful's praise of God is enacting the justice that has already been "written." Many have theorized as to what "written" references, acknowledging that it typically refers to actual written texts. Brodersen outlines the most common theories—that it is referring to: (1) judgment texts against physical enemies outlined in the Torah, such as Deut. 20:13, 16–18 or those found in Joshua and Judges due to the similar two-edged sword references and Israel battling other nations; (2) prophetic judgment texts leading to an eschatological interpretation, such as Isa. 41:14–16 and generally in Isaiah; (3) Ps. 2 which leads to a messianic interpretation; (4) a lost or unknown text; (5) "a heavenly book containing God's notes for future judgement because of similar ideas in

¹¹⁰ Spurgeon, *Psalms*, 325.

texts like Isa. 4:3; 56:6, Mal. 3:16, and Dan. 12:1,” rendering an eschatological interpretation; (6) a “general idea of YHWH’s justice and judgment” indicated in “Qumran texts with reference to general ideas rather than specific texts.”¹¹¹

When considering what written texts the psalmist may be denoting, it is helpful to also consider the pivotal nature of the Psalter itself. The book of Psalms is often used to interpret “other previously existing texts in . . . the Old Testament” and Ps. 149 itself has been called a hymn belonging to a “group of texts praising God in theological reflection.”¹¹² Jesus himself frequently utilized Psalms as a teaching tool citing them more than any other Old Testament text.¹¹³ They also helped to “substantiate the veracity of the church’s teachings, especially regarding . . . the messianic role of Jesus Christ as the Savior of the human race.”¹¹⁴ Given the centrality of the book in the story of Yahweh and his people, it is fitting that the written text could signify judgment against the physical enemies of Israel, in addition to messianic and eschatological interpretations. Lawson posits that the written text references “written prophecies of Scripture in which God had promised to defeat the nations that had occupied the promised land (Deut. 7:1-2; Josh. 1:3-9).”¹¹⁵ Israel needed to first clear the land in order to inhabit the territory. Today, the kingdom of God is his people’s “promised land”—a people who are charged to clear the land as they sing their new song and move in to occupy their promised territory—the kingdom of God. According to Derek Kidner, John 16:11 presents a

¹¹¹ Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter*, 107.

¹¹² Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter*, 9.

¹¹³ McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian*, 100.

¹¹⁴ Wesselschmidt, “Psalms 51–150,” 8:100.

¹¹⁵ Lawson, *Holman Old Testament Commentary*, 12:369.

correlation with Ps. 149:9 as the judgment is ultimately “written by the cross against the ‘ruler of this world,’ the same power behind opposing nations and peoples.”¹¹⁶

The executing of judgment is “*glory* for all his committed people,” a word most often used “in the Psalter to refer to the ‘splendor’ of God and the kings of ancient Israel (see Pss. 29:4, 45:4, 111:3, 145:5, 12), but used in Ps. 149 as it is in 8:5 in reference to all humanity.”¹¹⁷ The work of God taken up by the people of God to execute the judgment written is their glory, realized in worship as warfare.¹¹⁸ Yet, as Janzen writes, the glory is not a vengeance the world would recognize as it is in the way of the suffering Servant whose “*vengeance* on the transgressors is to *intercede* for them.” As a messianic people continuing the work of Jesus, the Deutero-Isaiah suffering Servant now interceding for his people (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25), it is their honor and glory “in *imaging God*” to subvert “conventional wisdom by identifying *human praise of a non-violent God* as the true ‘two-mouthed sword.’”¹¹⁹ Thus, it is the highest honor for the community of Yahweh to worship him, knowing that in so doing they are, in fact, interceding that the kingdom of God would come.

Conclusion

Psalm 149 relates to the doctoral project by establishing the biblical foundation for authentic worship, including the reason the people of God are to worship, how they

¹¹⁶ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, Kidner Classic Commentaries, 3 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 490, EBSCOhost.

¹¹⁷ DeClaissé-Walford, *The Book of Psalms*, 786.

¹¹⁸ Lawson, *Holman Old Testament Commentary*, 12:369.

¹¹⁹ Janzen, “The High Praises of God,” 65.

are to worship, their work of worship as ambassadors of their King, and gives expectations for what their worship of God is accomplishing. This passage yields a biblical picture of both the communal and personal nature of worship denoting both exuberance and intimacy. Yahweh is not a far-off God, but one who calls his people his children, delighting in them and helping them as they relish the glory accompanying his presence. The worship of the godly becomes a powerful weapon bringing restorative correction to those who are not the people of God and renders powerless the leadership of those spiritual forces opposing God. Resultingly, the worshipers of God can have a confident expectation of victory as their worship becomes intercession for the advancement of the kingdom of God in their lives.

As a people of God, it is time to sing a new song relaying the kingdom of God breaking in on the world and calling people to him that others may recognize his sovereignty and be called his child. Worshiping with a new song conveys an expectation that God is in the process of bringing his kingdom to earth and recognizes that worship partners with him to bring that to fruition. Singing the new song includes an awareness that God utilizes worship in establishing his throne and ushering in his kingdom. The words Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "may your kingdom come," is echoed in new song worship.¹²⁰ Worshiping with a new song acknowledges the importance of worship within the corporate body as well as in private, as it helps to establish his throne in our communities and in each of our lives.

Psalms 149 communicates a deep sense of the faithful belonging to God. Grasping a firm sense of one's identity is integral to worship; his people need to know their value

¹²⁰ Matt. 6:10; Luke 11:2.

as children of God and their accompanying inheritance and authority in him. One can know that he feels about them as a Father who loves his children. They are Israel, his chosen and he delights in them—they are reciprocating that delight when worshiping. Realizing who one is propels them to bring about the justice God desires and that the oppressed cry out for. As his children, we should comprehend that it is our privilege to have the opportunity to make a difference, similar to a child inheriting a trust fund who recognizes their responsibility to designate funds to those in need.

Worship that understands our identity in Yahweh remembers that our Father has “seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6). From this vantage point, one gains a greater perspective, enabling each worshiper to better see “the forest for the trees” and agree with God that his will be done. Hope fills and further stirs worshipers to cry out, “Have your way, Lord,” confident in the love he has for them. Faith fuels and enables them to follow where he would lead in even the most daunting circumstances. When one is reminded in worship that they are the beloved of God as his *imago dei*, they are better fit to continue the way of Jesus, who is interceding for his people at the right hand of the Father.¹²¹

The godly in Psalm 149 display an unashamed exuberance in worship that should in some way characterize every congregation called a people of the Lord. Whether or not dancing is a regular occurrence, the picture is one of freedom and rejoicing that is not too proud to involve the entire body as a sacrament of praise. As David danced before the Lord and the people, he made himself vulnerable, caring more about honoring Yahweh than worrying about what people might think. When we focus on who the Lord is,

¹²¹ Janzen, “The High Praises of God,” 58.

understanding who we are in him, we can't help but experience joy and gratitude. When we allow that inner gratitude to be displayed in outward exuberance and enthusiasm, joy and freedom is often released in others.

As the godly in Ps. 149 are to rejoice on their beds, we understand that worship is not restricted to public occasions or for show but should originate from a place of sincere rest and authenticity. Resting comes from knowing who we are and how God works on our behalf. Amazingly, Yahweh, the Lord over all creation, desires to meet with us in intimacy. As Father to the fatherless, he is not a far-off egomaniacal God demanding slavish praise. Instead, abandoned and intimate worship deepens the partnership God chooses to have with his people. He reveals himself to those who seek to know him with their whole heart (Jer. 29:13), so the more aligned we are with him in worship, the greater awareness we have of his presence as we intercede in accordance with his purposes and plans to impact transformation.

It is from the place of rest and intimacy that our battle swords are wielded to break apart every stronghold of the enemy. Gould summarizes it this way: “The joyful praise of God’s people is the weapon by which they conquer all their enemies.”¹²² When we worship, we are recognizing and coming in line with the rightful order of all existence. We are announcing to the seen and unseen world God’s sovereignty, our grateful praise for who he is, and who we are in him. Although our offering of praise is directed to an audience of One, the cloud of witnesses has a front row seat, as do the opposing spiritual forces. Our very worship serves to lift up and establish the throne of God before all creation. Our declaration of the sovereignty of God is wielded as a sword in the hands of

¹²² Dana Gould, *Shepherd’s Notes: Psalms 101–150*, Shepherd’s Notes Commentary Series (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1999), 117, ProQuest Ebook Central.

those who have been authorized by the cross and the One who conquered death. This kind of worship shatters strongholds as it breaks apart the schemes of the enemy with his rulers bound and rendered ineffective. Thus, more easily addictions are broken, marriages are restored, physical ailments are healed, godly perspectives emerge, hearts open up, and people come to know the Lord.

Psalms 149 recognizes worship as the first line of defense and affirms that how we worship matters. The kind of worship that breaks strongholds is passionate, unashamed, intimate, authentic, rooted in identity, understands the power contained within worship, rests on the sovereignty of God, breaks the chains that keep us in bondage, is expectant, and rejoices in partnering with God to bring others to his throne. No matter the situation, our worship is the correct response to bring the deliverance and justice needed. Practical solutions may also be necessary, but worship should be the place to begin as lasting transformation begins in the spiritual realm. The imagery in Ps. 149 agrees with Gerhard von Rad's premise that "Israel's hymnic praise was considered continually necessary for the upkeep of wholesome and blessed life."¹²³ Accordingly, worship in the framework of Ps. 149 leads to a victorious life based on an intimate and communal partnership with the sovereign God that is crucial for promoting his kingdom in the life of the community and individual. That intimate and communal partnership between God and people will be on display as we turn our gaze to the people of Wales in the early twentieth century.

¹²³ Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "The Dynamics of Praise in the Ancient Near East, or Poetry and Politics," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Book of Psalms: The Current State of Scholarship*, ed. Nancy L. DeClaisse-Walford, Society of Biblical Literature. Ancient Israel and Its Literature (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2014), 36, EBSCOhost.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction: The Welsh Revival of 1904–5

Nearing midnight as the fires of revival were igniting across the hills and valleys of Wales in 1904, a young girl's voice rang out clear and true in the overflowing local chapel singing, "Here is love vast as the ocean."¹ The clearness of that voice quickly turned into sobs as she cried out her devotion, reeling from the deep conviction gripping her.² The people listening were not immune to the sincere emotion and sense of consecration characterizing the performance that "moved almost everyone to tears."³ The song would become the signifying worship hymn in the movement known as a "singing, prayer, and worship revival."⁴

Throughout the two-year revival, at least one hundred thousand people were added to churches in Wales and by some estimates more than five million people came to the Lord worldwide; figures that helped it earn the top position among the greatest

¹ David Edward Pike, "The Story of The Love-Song of the 1904-5 Revival," *Welldigger*, May 20, 2011, http://daibach-welldigger.blogspot.com/2011/05/story-of-love-song-1904-5-revival_20.html.

² Pike, "The Story."

³ Pike, "The Story."

⁴ Vernon M. Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 153, ProQuest Ebook Central.

revivals in history.⁵ Elmer Towns reports that as news of the revival in Wales spread, it encouraged the prayer efforts of those already seeking a similar awakening. Subsequently, revivals broke out in countries around the world largely because of its influence on a scale never before felt in church history.⁶ While, according to Wolfgang Reinhardt, it may not have been “the actuator of *all* these worldwide awakenings . . . it was certainly the most impressive part of a general simultaneous movement.”⁷ Los Angeles especially felt the impact with the birth of the Pentecostal movement in a small unpretentious building on Azusa Street which was also “voted . . . one of the hundred most important religious movements of the millennium.”⁸ Both the Azusa and Welsh revivals were similarly characterized by “Spirit-led spontaneous worship, singing, testimonies and ministry.”⁹

The guiding focus of this historical study is to examine how the Welsh Revival of 1904–5 informs the main principles of the hypothesis that participants who are taught to engage in vulnerable and authentic musical worship with an expectation of encountering the Spirit of the Lord will relay one or more of the following: a heightened awareness of his presence with its accompanying characteristics, such as love, joy, peace and faith;

⁵ A survey given to 13 “authorities on revival” determined that the 1904 Welsh revival was the greatest one in history. Elmer Towns and Douglas Porter, *The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever*, Kindle edition. (Ann Arbor, MI: Destiny Image, 2014), 12.

⁶ “The Welsh theologian Noel Gibbard has given the most detailed description: *On the Wings of the Dove: The International Effects of the Welsh Revival of 1904-05* (Bridgend, 2002).” Wolfgang Reinhardt, “‘A Year of Rejoicing’: The Welsh Revival 1904-05 and Its International Challenges,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 31, no. 2 (April 2007): 100, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials, EBSCOhost.

⁷ Reinhardt, “A Year of Rejoicing,” 100.

⁸ Towns and Porter, *The Ten Greatest Revivals*, 17.

⁹ Kingdom Treasure Ministries, “The Welsh Revival of 1904–1905—Truth in History,” *Truth in History*, <http://truthinhistory.org/the-welsh-revival-of-1904-1905-2.html>.

physical and/or emotional healing; an increased desire to engage in worship; and a greater sense of purpose and freedom in worship. The case will be presented that the Welsh Revival highlights the role intimate and authentic worship plays in the transformation of individuals and communities providing a supportive framework for the project. In this process, an overview of the context, Revival beginnings, its defining characteristics, features of worship, and impact of the Revival will be discussed.

Context of the Revival

Although over a hundred years ago and overseas, the issues facing the Welsh people before the revival have broad similarities to those facing America today. Reinhardt's "A Year of Rejoicing" outlines the cultural state of Wales in the years leading up to the 1904 revival. The country was experiencing significant population growth—a ten percent increase in some areas—due to recent industrialization. Additionally, widespread migration was in process from rural to urban areas resulting in a weakening of the churches. The migration also led to an increasingly dual-linguistic society as the Welsh language began to be spoken less, which was considered a threat to nationalism and its accompanying Christian identity. Pluralism was on the rise and the field of education was no exception as secular institutions began to replace the Sunday School, which had historically "made Wales into a reading nation." Ecclesiastical divisions were evident as the Anglican Church in Wales no longer held a majority population, having lost a large percentage to non-Conformist religions, such as Independents (Congregationalists), Calvinistic Methodists, Baptists and Wesleyan

Methodists. Another type of migration was underway as people transitioned from the Anglican Church to the non-Conformist chapel.¹⁰

The greater Church in Wales was not ignorant to the need for revival and the call for prayer was widespread across denominational lines. One such leader astutely commented, “While the church sleeps, the enemy busily sows tares among the wheat. Nothing short of an outpouring of the Spirit from on high will uproot them, and save our land from becoming prey to atheism and ungodliness.”¹¹ Indeed, the Welsh were no strangers to revival; Wales is often considered the most prominent country in Europe for revivals.¹² The most recent awakening had occurred in 1859 and many were expectant and hungry for a fresh outpouring. Consequently, interdenominational prayer meetings were increasingly birthed and attended in the way of Jonathan Edwards' *Concert of Prayer* originally published in 1747, although still popular at that time.¹³

Another telling prophetic statement came from Dean David Howell, a “highly respected authority” of the Anglican Church, in his last month of life, January 1903. It was considered significant in that he was not from the more excitable “chapel” group. He wrote,

“What is Wales’ greatest need?... There has never before been so much preaching, but what of the effects?... Take note, if this was to be my last message to my fellow countrymen... before I am taken to the judgement it would remain thus... The greatest need of my dear nation and country at this time is spiritual revival through a specific outpouring of the Holy Spirit... Not a local disturbance... but a

¹⁰ Reinhardt, ““A Year of Rejoicing,”” 102.

¹¹ Towns and Porter, *The Ten Greatest Revivals*, 18.

¹² Edward J. Gitre, “The 1904–05 Welsh Revival: Modernization, Technologies, and Techniques of the Self,” *Church History* 73, no. 4 (December 2004): 794, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials, EBSCOhost.

¹³ Reinhardt, ““A Year of Rejoicing,”” 104.

kind of spiritual saturation, that overflows into the country as a whole, that would immerse all classes with the Baptism of the Holy Spirit...”¹⁴

This powerful declaration served to further rally people from various denominations, inspiring them to continue their prayer efforts even more fervently. The next year, their “concert of prayer” would be answered.

Revival Beginnings

In an attempt to determine the start date of the revival, some point to a simple girl’s unassuming announcement in a gathering of young people on February 14, 1904. Impacted by the preaching of Joseph Jenkins, a Calvinist-Methodist minister who had recently experienced his own dramatic encounter with the Holy Spirit, Florrie Evans testified simply but with emotion in a youth gathering: “I am not able to say very much today but I love the Lord Jesus with all my heart—he died for me.”¹⁵ It is said that a hush came over the group, overcome by the fear of the Lord as they recognized his awesome presence among them. Soon after, quiet sobs began to fill the room as others came under conviction and each seemed to receive a revelation of God’s love through the work of Jesus.¹⁶

¹⁴ Reinhardt, ““A Year of Rejoicing,”” 105.

¹⁵ Joshua Jenkins had been desperately seeking God for more of himself, culminating in an experience in which he felt the Holy Spirit enveloping him in “a blue flame.” Following this experience, his passion for the Word and insight in preaching its truths dramatically increased, and his messages seemed to “cut to the very hearts of his listeners.” Florrie was one of those being convicted by his messages and had made a decision to make Jesus the Lord over her life the night before. She wrote that it was as she yielded to the Holy Spirit’s promptings that she began to testify of her love for him. David Edward Pike, “Florrie Evans: The Girl Who Started a Revival,” *Welldigger*, October 11, 2015, <http://daibach-welldigger.blogspot.com/2015/10/the-story-of-girl-who-began-revival.html>.

¹⁶ Reinhardt, ““A Year of Rejoicing,”” 106–7.

Joshua Jenkins along with a few youth, began to travel to nearby congregations to testify to how God was moving in hopes of passing the flame. A similar conviction and revelation of God's presence began happening at those subsequent meetings and the early revival fires spread.¹⁷ Jenkins' regular ministry team consisted of a few young people, including Florrie, who would later become one of the ministry musicians for Evan Roberts, the ostensible leader of the revival. Jenkins accredited Florrie with helping to deliver him from becoming mired in "self and philosophy."¹⁸ An illustration of this happened one evening a few months later when she interrupted his preaching by singing "Just as I am," bringing him to his knees as he cried out, "O Lamb of God, I come."¹⁹ The spontaneity of that event would characterize much of the revival that came to be known for its authentic worship and praise moments.

Although some consider those events the impetus of the revival, many don't acknowledge its true beginnings until later that year after Evan Roberts attended meetings in Blaenannerch. He had been fervently praying that the Holy Spirit would "set his heart on fire."²⁰ His prayers would be answered in a meeting on September 28th, experiencing a baptism of love and joy, a "filling with the Holy Spirit" that gave him a "decisive call for his future life."²¹ He had heard the minister, Seth Joshua, pray that the Lord would "bend us," which seemed to be the only thing he could hear. Roberts relays, "It was the Spirit that put the emphasis for me on 'bend us.' 'That is what you need,' said the Spirit to me.

¹⁷ Reinhardt, "'A Year of Rejoicing,'" 106–7.

¹⁸ Pike, "Florrie Evans."

¹⁹ Pike, "Florrie Evans."

²⁰ Jennifer Trafton, "The Spark That Lit the Welsh Revival," *Christian History and Biography* 83 (July 1, 2004): 11, Christian Periodical Index, EBSCOhost.

²¹ Reinhardt, "'A Year of Rejoicing,'" 107.

And as I went out I prayed, 'Oh Lord, bend me.'"²² That phrase would in essence become the revival's theme, "Bend the Church and save the world."²³ Following that experience, he gained new confidence, "lost all nervousness" in speaking, and had the ability to "sing all day long," all of which he had previously struggled with.²⁴ Soon after, he had a vision of an arm stretching down from heaven to lift Wales up into heaven which served to confirm his prayers for revival. Afterward, he shared with friends his urgency to prepare for "the mightiest revival that Wales has ever known."²⁵

That vision prompted Roberts to return to his home chapel in Loughor and begin a week's worth of meetings. From that first Monday, October 31st, to midway of the following week, the services grew in attendance from a humble seventeen to such a large crowd that they began to overflow even the church in the nearby town where he had begun holding meetings.²⁶ He wrote to Florrie to come and assist him in the revival efforts, which she did along with another woman, Maud Davies. It was the start of a team approach in which no one person took center stage with prayer, testimony and praise continually at the forefront of each service.²⁷

²² Trafton, "The Spark."

²³ Trafton, "The Spark."

²⁴ Gitre, "The 1904–05 Welsh Revival," 798.

²⁵ Roberts Liardon, *God's Generals Why They Succeeded and Why Some Fail* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2000), 84.

²⁶ Towns and Porter, *The Ten Greatest Revivals*, 21.

²⁷ Pike, "Florrie Evans."

Revival Characteristics

While Evan Roberts may be considered to have been the human leader of the revival, the broad consensus recognizes that it was not a human-led movement. Services seemed to have a fluency to them acknowledging that the Holy Spirit was the one leading the congregation. The guidance of the Holy Spirit was said to be evident as various prayers, choruses, or Scripture verses were offered and intermixed without a cohesive plan, yet “all in the most perfect harmony and intensity. Mr. Roberts . . . in no way interferes with what is going on, and no one stops in prayer, singing or testimony because he appears.”²⁸ Roberts was a firm believer in allowing the Holy Spirit to direct the meeting, willingly changing tactics and prayerfully remaining in the background—often tearfully on his knees or face down on the floor—to not interrupt the spontaneous and passionate singing.²⁹ It was not unusual for him to be scheduled for a meeting and show up several hours after it had begun, potentially unnoticed while the congregants continued in prayer, singing and testifying as moved by the Spirit. A London journalist penned that “you feel that the thousand or fifteen hundred persons before you have become merged into one myriad-headed but single-souled personality.”³⁰

Indeed, while Evan Roberts might have played a prominent role in the revival, it was greatly influenced by the reporting of news outlets placing him in such a position and keeping him firmly rooted there.³¹ Of the many thousands of meetings across Wales, Roberts was said to be at only about 250 of them. A contemporary notable minister wrote

²⁸ Solomon Benjamin Shaw, *The Great Revival in Wales* (Chicago, IL: S. B. Shaw, 1905), 15.

²⁹ Reinhardt, ““A Year of Rejoicing,”” 108.

³⁰ Shaw, *The Great Revival in Wales*, 66.

³¹ Reinhardt, ““A Year of Rejoicing,”” 110–111.

that Roberts' role was to be a "mouth-piece of the fact that there is no human guidance as to man or organization. . . . His work is not that of appealing to men so much as that of creating an atmosphere by calling men to follow the guidance of the Spirit in whatever the Spirit shall say to them."³² A psychological study of the Revival determined that Roberts "neither created nor sustained it for the most part. He is the embodiment of the Spirit of the Revival . . . but did not produce the Revival, nor did the Revival produce him."³³ Besides highlighting the activities of Roberts' services, those news reports helped to spread the exciting happenings of the Revival, piquing interest and raising expectations.³⁴

The services themselves were characterized by joy, often expressed in laughter, dancing, and heartfelt remorse demonstrated through crying and brokenness as people experienced the presence of God.³⁵ While some harshly judged the "visionary and ecstatic" phenomenon protesting of "flitting scenes of spiritual phantasmagoria," many considered it evidence of God at work.³⁶ The outpouring began to be seen in the context of Acts 2:15–18, the Pentecost narrative, which seemed to best explain the events:

For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

"And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,

³² "Sermon by the Rev. G. Campbell Morgan, D.D. Delivered in Westminster Chapel on Sunday evening, 25th December, 1904." Shaw, *The Great Revival in Wales*, 1104.

³³ Reinhardt, "'A Year of Rejoicing,'" 111.

³⁴ Reinhardt, "'A Year of Rejoicing,'" 108.

³⁵ Liardon, *God's Generals*, 35.

³⁶ Timothy B. Walsh and Ian M Randall, *To Meet and Satisfy a Very Hungry People: The Origins and Fortunes of English Pentecostalism, 1907-1925* (Milton Keynes, UK: Authentic Media, 2012), 110, ProQuest Ebook Central.

and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams;
even on my male servants and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.³⁷

Truly, the power and fire of Pentecost was on display as Reverend Campbell noted, responding to those who were skeptical: “. . . vision is passing out into virtue, and men are paying their debts, and abandoning the public-house, and treating their horses well. . . . An emotion that will make a man do that is worth cultivating.”³⁸

Revival activities and thoughts monopolized the hearts and minds of the town’s inhabitants as coal miners rushed from the mines and shops closed early so its workers could attend the packed services that started early and stretched long into the night. The South Wales’ Gazette reported that,

Drunkards have been soberised, publicans have lost much business, conduct on public streets has been elevated, and the police and magistrates have had quieter times... The bottom of the pits have been utilised as centres for prayer and praise meetings, and there has been a general raising of the standard of public life. The “Revival” still continues to monopolise general attention, almost everybody is talking about it, thinking about it, or working in its interests, and the movement does not seem to flag at all... Converts are being made nightly, and the enthusiasm is intensifying and spreading. ...the chapel was packed in the afternoon... and there was a warmer feeling in the assembly from the start. Probably this was chiefly due to the spirit which a company of colliery workmen - black faces, working clothes, and boxes and jacks - imparted when they dropped into the meeting on their way home... and started in a spirited manner the songs of the revival, creating a fervour which did not flag during the remainder of the meeting.³⁹

³⁷ Gitre, “The 1904–05 Welsh Revival,” 18.

³⁸ Shaw, *The Great Revival in Wales*, 101.

³⁹ Roy Jenkins, “The Welsh Revival,” *BBC*, last modified June 16, 2009, https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/history/welshrevival_1.shtml.

This and other historical accounts reflect that God's presence and holiness encompassed every aspect of life, both in and out of the church.⁴⁰

Indeed, the activity of God seemed to impact every aspect of society. Public houses emptied as the men turned from drinking and instead brought their wages home to their families and/or increased their charitable giving. Horses used for hauling goods and coal were confused regarding how to respond to commands that were no longer shouted and filled with colorful expletives. Reconciliation was frequent as prior enemies made peace with each other, debts were paid off and ministries were formed to help the poor, sick and marginalized in society. The police in one town formed a church choir as they found their neighborhoods suddenly transformed, needing little policing. One reporting Englishman summarized: "It is difficult (especially for an Englishman) to describe this great religious awakening. The Welsh Revival is not confined to a few, nor to the many Welsh Chapels; it is evident, in the streets, in the cars, in the trains—in fact, it is almost everywhere in this district."⁴¹

The Welsh Revival was also significant in that it involved women and youth, both in scope, and specifically, in areas of leadership that were previously uncommon for those groups. Before the Revival, women were not permitted to be in public positions. However, with the onset of the Revival, they were able to praise and pray out in the open, breaking a huge social barrier.⁴² A well-known London editor, Wm. T. Stead commented, "I was delighted to see that at last the Welsh churches are recognizing the equal ministry of men and women." A few women even took the lead role in a church or chapel service,

⁴⁰ Reinhardt, "'A Year of Rejoicing,'" 108.

⁴¹ Gitre, "The 1904–05 Welsh Revival," 797.

⁴² Liardon, *God's Generals*, 85.

becoming revival leaders, including Mary Jones of Egryn. She gained national recognition after receiving numerous visions which appeared as “stars and a light in form of a fire ball,” guiding her to the homes of those she was to pray for next; unusual in the fact that others—including members of the press—also saw and testified of their veracity.⁴³

It was the youth that initially spread the news and gave testimony of the revival, taking on leadership roles alongside such figures as Evan Roberts. Annie Davies, her sister, Maggie, and S.A. Jones traveled regularly with him and throughout Wales, eventually becoming known as the “Singing Sisters.”⁴⁴ The three girls had approached Roberts when meeting each other after that first service when Annie sang out, “Here is Love,” desiring to “consecrate our [their] voices to the Master.”⁴⁵ The experience so moved the girls that they, along with some other youth, went from public houses where they “sang hymns and induced men who were drinking” to join the meetings.⁴⁶ Other reports tell of children organizing prayer meetings during breaks in the school day, singing and praying when the teacher’s back was turned, evangelizing in the streets and helping to bring their parents to the revival meetings.⁴⁷ Some even considered it a youth movement with teenagers and young adults leading spontaneous prayer and worship.⁴⁸

⁴³ Reinhardt, ““A Year of Rejoicing,”” 111–112.

⁴⁴ Liardon, *God’s Generals*, 44.

⁴⁵ Pike, “The Story.”

⁴⁶ Kingdom Treasure Ministries, “The Welsh Revival of 1904–1905,”.

⁴⁷ Rhodri Hayward, *Resisting History: Religious Transcendence and the Invention of the Unconscious*, Encounters (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2007), 121, EBSCOhost.

⁴⁸ Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 154.

As the intensity of the Revival began to wind down, some pointed to Roberts' erratic behavior as contributing to its quick end in Wales. Roberts typically kept a frenetic schedule as he attempted to personally visit as many places as possible. It was ultimately that lack of self-care that may have led to his several breakdowns, beginning in the spring of 1905.⁴⁹ Although the Revival was relatively short as time is measured, its impact has been felt long past the revival fires in Wales themselves.

A Worship Revival

Although the style and loose format of the services became the norm for the Welsh Revival, they were not characteristic of services preceding the Revival. Vernon Whaley refers to the Revival services as “more akin to what we would call worship and prayer meetings or, as it is often called today, ‘harp and bowl’ gatherings. In a very real sense, the Welsh revival was a worship revival.”⁵⁰ Previous revivals, involving Moody or Sankey, featured structured congregational singing along with solos and a choir along with a call to repentance at the end of the service. In contrast, the Welsh Revival encouraged reconciliation and repentance throughout services that ebbed and flowed with the voices of the entire congregation, at times singularly or corporately raised in prayer and worship.

It is, perhaps, significant that the Welsh people have a rich heritage of hymn singing and music. Stead noted that the revival “followed the line of song, not of preaching,” declaring that the Welsh “are a nation of singing birds,” in determining its

⁴⁹ Gitre, “The 1904–05 Welsh Revival,” 826.

⁵⁰ Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 153.

consequence to the revival.⁵¹ He continued that it is not that the Welsh people were not well-versed in preaching: “These people . . . are taught to death, preached to insensibility. . . . They know that they are not living as they ought to live, and no amount of teaching will add anything to that conviction.”⁵² It was only the Holy Spirit, as another local reverend observed, who was able to shatter “that which we value far too much; this deadly, dull, respectable formality that passes for Christian worship and Christian work.”⁵³ In its place, as Stead confirmed, the people “abandon[ed] themselves to their singing. We [Englishmen] sing as though we thought it would not be respectable to be heard by the man next to us.”⁵⁴ He seemed to look somewhat enviously at “the spontaneity, joyousness, freshness, freedom, [of] vocal music consecrated and employed: Celtic temperament mastered and appropriated for a sacred purpose.”⁵⁵

The Revival catapulted the Welsh into the national spotlight helping them to overcome the stereotype of being unable to fully take their place in the contemporary world unless aided by neighboring England.⁵⁶ Previous revivals had helped to institute hymns as a foundation for much of the Welsh literature, utilized again in the 1904 Revival.⁵⁷ Indeed, as Paul Westermeyer, a church musicologist stated, “The faith of a community comes to life in its musicmaking. In music, the faith and life of a people take

⁵¹ Shaw, *The Great Revival in Wales*, 33.

⁵² Shaw, *The Great Revival in Wales*, 52.

⁵³ Shaw, *The Great Revival in Wales*, 68.

⁵⁴ Shaw, *The Great Revival in Wales*, 94.

⁵⁵ Shaw, *The Great Revival in Wales*, 116.

⁵⁶ Price Huw, *J. E. Lloyd and the Creation of Welsh History: Renewing a Nation's Past* (Cardiff, UK: University of Wales Press, 2011), 6, EBSCOhost.

⁵⁷ Shaw, *The Great Revival in Wales*, 187.

flesh."⁵⁸ And faith did truly take hold in the mountains and hills of Wales as the people learned to depend “solely on the power and presence of the Holy Spirit The mountains and the hills have broken into singing, and in our generation we have never before heard the like,” reported the London Methodist Times.⁵⁹

The prominence of worship in the Revival also served to break down cultural barriers that were often experienced in the dual-linguistic society. Society was under pressure to express themselves in English, with some determinedly holding on to their Welsh language. In spoken messages or testimonies, one would speak in either Welsh or English, but during worship in the services, those distinctions were often blurred. One London reporter noted,

Sometimes singing and prayer would go on together, but there was no real confusion as the praying was not to man, and the singing was not to man. But such singing is rarely to be heard. It was perfect time and perfect harmony; often the same hymn (never given out, but started spontaneously), sung in English and in Welsh at the same time, and sung over and over, until it penetrated.⁶⁰

It was also noted that worship became a form of intercession as people cried out to God in music. After attending a Revival service, one reverend wrote that people are performing their duties of being thankful and interceding as Christian priests. And while doing their work of worship, others are coming to Christ, repentant and yielded to the Lord Jesus.⁶¹ With prayer and worship seamlessly intertwined, the conversation to God continued whether spoken or sung.

⁵⁸ Stephen Dove, “Hymnody and Liturgy in the Azusa Street Revival, 1906-1908,” *Pneuma* 31, no. 2 (2009): 246, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials, EBSCOhost.

⁵⁹ Shaw, *The Great Revival in Wales*, 32.

⁶⁰ Shaw, *The Great Revival in Wales*, 14.

⁶¹ Shaw, *The Great Revival in Wales*, 99.

Worship also naturally became a method of evangelizing. As earlier noted, the young people would go out singing on the streets and in the public houses while inviting others to services. There are also instances recorded of people being drawn into the services by hearing the worship while standing outside or walking past the church building during services. One such story is of Tom, finally entering the chapel on the fourth night of having repeatedly listened to the worship as he stood just outside the building from a desire to "touch the hem of his garment." Initially drawn by the singing, he repented and surrendered his life to God, and then led his family in a time of worship at home.⁶² Other instances tell of drunken men stumbling inside during the singing, confessing and repenting during the service and finally leaving as completely sober and changed men.⁶³

One of the most prominent features of the worship throughout the Welsh Revival was the spontaneity and improvisation accompanying the services. As improvisational singing is noted for its inherent sense of freedom with the singer not restricted to one particular way of rendering the song, this was demonstrated in its simplest form as certain songs were put to different melodies. "Dyma gariad," known in English as "Here is Love," was initially sung by Davies to the tune of "Britain's Lament," as that was the melody lingering with her throughout the day before coming to her first revival service.⁶⁴ Including "Britain's Lament," there are no less than four tunes that have been used during the revival with the words to "Dyma gariad," whether sung as a solo or

⁶² Shaw, *The Great Revival in Wales*, 162.

⁶³ Shaw, *The Great Revival in Wales*, 27.

⁶⁴ Pike, "The Story."

congregationally.⁶⁵ Putting verses to different folk tunes or other hymn melodies was a common practice. Davies was “especially gifted in providing improvised songs between times of prayer and testimony,” after which Roberts also might preach or lead in praying, although he would also engage in improvisational worship.⁶⁶ Roberts believed that worship was integral to releasing the activity of the Holy Spirit in any meeting. In response to a question by a London reporter regarding whether he thought revival would come to that city, he queried with a smile, “Can you sing?”⁶⁷

The freedom experienced by those who led out in worship also extended to the congregation. One observer noted, “Such marvelous singing, quite unrehearsed, could only be created by the Holy Spirit. No choir. No conductor, no organ—just spontaneous, unctionised [sic] soul-singing. . . . the meeting ran itself. There was no leader, but people felt an unseen control. Singing, sobbing, praying intermingled without intermission.”⁶⁸ Another participant noted that a kind of soft singing might underscore several who were also simultaneously praying, noting that it “often leads the soul into a quiet ecstasy that is truly of Heaven.”⁶⁹ Indeed, it was not uncommon to hear of people who had experienced dramatic encounters or fillings by the Holy Spirit having ecstatic experiences following the services that were characterized by intense joy, trembling, and a continual song for several hours afterward.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Pike, “The Story.”

⁶⁶ Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 155.

⁶⁷ Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 155.

⁶⁸ Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 155.

⁶⁹ Shaw, *The Great Revival in Wales*, 29.

⁷⁰ Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 155.

Impact of the Revival

While the effects of the revival on the surrounding culture was transformative in its immediate impact, the visible long-term effects may have been less dramatic as has been common in previous revivals. Nevertheless, evidence of lasting change has been easily found, as enumerated by Reinhardt.⁷¹ As late as 1912, regular attendance at churches of all kinds in Wales was up ten percent compared to 1903. Those leaders created in the Revival helped to sustain the church in the approaching challenges, including the Great War and the Depression following. This included women, who had newly emerged in leadership during the Revival, stepping into roles left void by men during the First World War. Many also became missionaries or formed new missionary organizations, heeding the call to testify to the work God was doing. Additionally, new independent churches and conventions were founded, as well as an Evangelical magazine and three Bible schools.⁷²

When considering the long-term impact of the Revival, one must look outside of Wales to understand its significance. People all over the world learned of the Welsh Revival and subsequently made pilgrimages in a desire for revival themselves. Although Frank Bartleman did not visit Wales directly, he personally corresponded with Evan Roberts several times asking him to pray for L.A. and for insight on how to bring revival there.⁷³ Roberts assured him they were praying, included instruction on how to prepare for revival and communicated that he was confident God was about to send revival

⁷¹ Reinhardt, ““A Year of Rejoicing,”” 119.

⁷² Reinhardt, ““A Year of Rejoicing,”” 119.

⁷³ Liardon, *God’s Generals*, 89; 93.

throughout the rest of the world. It was within a few days that revival broke out on Azusa Street, which became significant in spreading the worldwide Pentecostal movement.⁷⁴

Many recognized that the Welsh meetings seemed to be led by the Holy Spirit instead of being devised by human machinations, which according to Donald Gee significantly contributed to others' anticipation and faith for what was possible. He wrote that the Welsh Revival's most foundational influence

was the creation of a widespread spirit of expectation for still greater things. Men justly asked 'Why Wales only? Why not other lands? Why not a worldwide Revival?'... Faith was rising to visualise a return to apostolic Christianity in all its pristine beauty and power... In this manner the spiritual soil was prepared in the providence of God for the rise of the Pentecostal Movement.⁷⁵

Ultimately, due to pilgrimages made to Wales or visits from the Welsh people testifying to the work of God, many countries from several continents experienced revival. The countries experiencing the greatest impact include France, Germany, and Norway in Europe; United States, Patagonia and the West Indies in America; China, Korea, Manchuria, Japan and, most significantly, India in Asia; South Africa, Congo, and Madagascar in Africa; and Australia and New Zealand in the continent of Australia.⁷⁶ The countries of England, Scotland and Ireland also felt the effects from their neighbors in Wales and they experienced their own revivals, as did several other countries on a smaller scale.

⁷⁴ Liardon, *God's Generals*, 139.

⁷⁵ Reinhardt, "'A Year of Rejoicing,'" 123.

⁷⁶ Reinhardt, "'A Year of Rejoicing,'" 123–124.

Conclusion

In examining the Welsh Revival of 1904–1905, it is apparent that praise and worship played a significant role in initiating and sustaining revival and transformation among not only its participants, but globally. As the Welsh people experienced the presence of God in worship, gender and class barriers came down, reconciliation abounded, high ethics became standard, and at least one hundred thousand people came to the Lord. New models of allowing the Holy Spirit to take the lead in the service were established and then utilized in revival efforts which flourished around the world.

Known for their rich heritage of music and hymn-singing, the Welsh people celebrated improvisation as a means of melodic expression, setting the stage for freedom in worship. As personal creativity is required for any successful improvisational performance, a measure of vulnerability is required as one submits something of themselves for review. Ostensibly, the Welsh community encouraged individual as well as communal expression lending itself to the spontaneity that would arise in the Revival. Such an atmosphere helps to give permission for people to experience the Holy Spirit by that same measure of freedom. As we experience him in freedom, he is better able to reach us in our deepest places, igniting joy and peace, as well as strength to yield to him in brokenness.

Truly, the work of the Holy Spirit and necessity of his presence was both acknowledged and encouraged throughout the Revival. The Welsh people relished the services known for their lack of strict structure as they recognized the value in allowing the Holy Spirit to move rather than following a script that might have resulted from human effort. This is not to say that no planning occurred, but that what was planned was

yielded to the move of the Spirit in the services. In that effort, the community would invite and ask for the Holy Spirit to come, usually in the form of singing, with an expectation that he would indeed show up.⁷⁷ Sally Morgenthaler summarizes the necessity of encountering God in our worship:

A sense of God's supernatural presence is the first essential of real worship. When the person of God is revealed in our worship, there is an electricity, an atmosphere of expectancy, joy, hope, and peace. Without a sense of God's nearness, worship is about as exciting as reading the minutes to the last board meeting. We might as well go home and balance our checkbooks or clean the garage.⁷⁸

Worship that transforms is completely dependent on the presence of the Holy Spirit, whom we should welcome and then expect in our times of worship.

When people are experiencing God's triune presence, they are reminded of their kingdom identity. Dr. Rich McLaughlin wrote of the worship atmosphere occurring in times of revival such as the Welsh outpouring, "While God's kingdom remains not fully here yet, his people are unmistakably experiencing more of his presence and his kingdom reality."⁷⁹ Experiencing his kingdom serves as a reminder of our identity in Christ, giving us a kingdom perspective. Dr. Robert Coleman describes how worship lifts us to the heavenly realms and becomes our reality;

Though our body is still held by the earth, our spirit can soar with the angels in the city of unceasing song. There we are at home. In the inner sanctuary of our being, we are already beginning to know something of that worship in which the King of heaven dwells.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Shaw, *The Great Revival in Wales*, 29.

⁷⁸ Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism: Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 96.

⁷⁹ Richard J. McLaughlin, "Missional Praise: Overflowing Worship in Times of Revival v7.0," *Evangelical Theological Society*, Midwest Regional paper (Spring 2019): 8, https://www.academia.edu/38564182/Missional_Praise_Overflowing_Worship_in_Times_of_Revival_v7.0_-_Evangelical_Theological_Society_Midwest_Regional_paper_Spring_2019_3_29_2019_.

⁸⁰ Coleman, R.E., *Singing with the Angels*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1980), 158.

It was that sense of the very presence of the kingdom of God being realized in people's lives that especially blurred the lines between worship and prayer in the Welsh Revival. Those two elements comprised the majority of the services, ultimately comingling with one another and characterizing much of life outside the church as well. As the Spirit would lead, nudging participants and the congregation, worship and prayer would stimulate each other in reciprocal fashion, becoming a continual form of communication which united the community with God and one another. As people are aligned with God and each other in worship, his heart is echoed in the ensuing communal prayers, which can then be offered in his name, according to his will. What a beautiful picture of the Church being an extension of Jesus' intercession from his throne in heaven to the earth!

Theologically, this could be considered a form of missional worship which Ruth A. Meyers outlines as "an understanding and practice of worship that engages worshipers in the mission of God, drawing them into God's self-offering of redemptive love through Christ and in the power of the Spirit."⁸¹ This aspect of missional worship was manifested in the Revival services and through the answered prayers of those Welsh who continually interceded on behalf of their community, nation, and other nations, who also experienced revival. As God stirred the hearts of the worshipers, many were prompted to enter the mission field or begin mission organizations to support the work. As people were reminded of Jesus' redemptive love and their kingdom identity, they were also able to shed the restrictive patterns in human nature that seek self, corrupt, and demand power.

⁸¹ Ruth A. Meyers, *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission: Gathering as God's People, Going Out in God's Name* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 12, EBSCOhost.

His presence experienced in worship is necessary for us to live in the *imago dei*, which finds fulfillment in loving others, holiness, and service. This was the impetus causing the shift involving every sect of society. It effectively blurred the lines between gender, race, and class so that opportunities presented themselves that had been previously withheld due to power, selfishness, and greed.

The Welsh Revival of 1904–5 is a beautiful example of Paul’s exhortation in Ephesians 5:19 to, “Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.” As the people of Wales joined God in what he was doing, initially by inviting his presence and resting in him through worship, individuals and whole communities were transformed. We can learn from them as a model in pursuing God’s presence, fostering atmospheres of freedom as worshipers belonging to the kingdom of God, and following the Holy Spirit’s lead in worship. The Welsh Revival created a far-reaching hunger and expectation for how God wants to meet with people, which helped to ignite revival fires around the world. This expectation is what God’s people are meant to have as it was always in his plan to commune intimately with us, which we will examine in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction: A Theology of Intimate Worship

When God created the world and placed man and woman in the Garden to care for it, he regularly walked with them and they had fellowship with one another. According to Robert Webber's definition of worship as a "meeting between God and his people" this would be considered the first instance of worship.¹ When Adam and Eve chose to tune their ear to the voice of the serpent and eat of the forbidden tree, that intimate communion was broken. Filled with shame, God's children immediately hid upon hearing his footsteps as he walked in the garden. They were forever cast out from the garden they were to work in and care for; that joyful place of intimate and regular connection with God. One can only imagine the real sense of loss that first couple must have felt in losing the ability to walk and talk face to face with their creator.

Ever since the Fall, people have been attempting to reach and reconnect with God. Made in his image and to manifest his glory,² God's creation is responding to his desire to meet with each one. And yet, time and again, man's endeavors to meet with God have

¹ Robert Webber, *Worship, Old and New*, 1st edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 11.

² Williams specifies that God did not merely create the world "for his own satisfaction or self-fulfillment, but to allow all creation to share the richness, the wonder, the glory of Himself." It is the fulfillment of our highest purpose when creation offers praise and thanksgiving back up to God thereby completing the circle. J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology: God, the World and Redemption: Systematic Theology from a Charismatic Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 116.

fallen short. The Tower of Babel is a prime example of a massively failed experiment of people attempting to reach God and bring him down “on their own terms.”³

At this point Yahweh knows that if he is to have real communion with his created ones, it would be incumbent upon him to devise a plan for that to occur. Accordingly, he connects with chosen individuals receptive to him, revealing himself to Noah, Abraham, Jacob and Joseph, with the purpose of creating a nation for himself through which he would reveal his character and desire for relationship with all people.⁴ But when Yahweh offers relationship to his children at Mount Sinai, the “people for God’s name” are overwhelmed with terror at the sight and sound of his presence and beg Moses to be the mediator (Deut. 5:22–27).⁵ As a result, God’s people reject direct communication with him, accepting instead the laws which would govern them as a people of God.⁶

Worship becomes formalized with a rigid set of guidelines to mandate acceptable ways to approach a holy God. His presence resides with the Israelites in the glory cloud, leading them, filling the tabernacle and then the temple. Nevertheless, Yahweh envisions a time when no barriers or rituals would exist between himself and his *imago dei*. And so, he comes to earth himself to do what no other could do. Jesus, the God-man becomes the

³ J. Daniel Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle: A Study of God’s Dwelling Places from Genesis to Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 27.

⁴ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), 432–433. Ladd discusses Paul’s frequent usage of the Old Testament as a means of showing God’s redemptive plan through his revelation to the Israelites with Christ being the fulfillment.

⁵ Fee describes the covenant made with Israel to be “a people, who would bear God’s name and be for God’s purposes.” Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub, 1994), 869–870.

⁶ Drs. Mark and Patti Virkler, *4 Keys to Hearing God’s Voice*, 53846th edition. (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2010), 78. Although the people rightly understand that neither can they withstand nor are permitted to be in his presence on the mountain, they reject the opportunity to listen to his voice.

bridge allowing people to commune with God regardless of location and other outward artifices.

The people of God today are privileged to worship him in spirit and truth, not dependent on their locale or adherence to a set of restrictions (John 4:23). God himself reaches down to each one in a continual invitation to commune with him. Indeed, as Constance Cherry rightly explains, “worship happens when we learn to say yes in ever-increasing ways to God’s invitation to encounter him.”⁷ Inevitably, one will spend a lifetime learning what it means to answer that invitation.

The imagery of spirit and truth worship is without barriers, existing on the most intimate of levels. And yet, many children of God do not seem to relate to their Father from that place of intimacy in worship, keeping him at a “safe distance,” either by choice or out of ignorance in not knowing what barriers might exist and how to remove them. Given those very real barriers, are people truly meant to intimately relate to the God of the universe and, if so, how is worship designed to enable one to foster that intimacy with God? And while that intimacy might be considered an end to itself as one finds their highest and best purpose in being united with the triune God, is that intimate connection also designed to accomplish another kind of work? Certainly, from the deep connectivity of giving and receiving in worship, God’s people should be spurred on to action in continuing the work of Jesus as his hands and feet. But is there also something accomplished in the very act of worship itself? Is partnership with God as his ambassadors on earth magnified when his worshipers lift up his name, promoting that his will be done on earth?

⁷ Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 4.

In addressing these questions, systematic theologies in accordance with Evangelical-Renewal perspectives will be implemented. While Renewal theology is, categorically, a recent branch, its designation includes Pentecostal, Charismatic and Third Wave movements under the larger umbrella of Evangelicalism. Worship birthed from various Renewal streams has sparked a global worship renewal with its pneumatological emphasis and songs filled with emotive lyrics. As the context of this research project is the evangelical church in the Bay Area and the hypothesis includes engaging with God in deepened intimacy through worship, these theological perspectives are appropriate.

Worship is best viewed holistically as an entire lifestyle devoted to God rather than a particular set of moments yielded to him, such as occurs during a church service. Nonetheless, those dedicated times of connection and surrender—whether in communal gatherings or individually—to God are vital in learning a joyful life of submission. This theology of intimate worship focuses attention on those purposeful moments—especially worship fostered through music—of connecting with the Father through praise and thanksgiving.

While this theological analysis emphasizes the vitality of intimacy with God in worship, no confusion should exist regarding the principal goal of worship as if it were reduced to that pursuit of intimacy alone. The primary goal should always be to glorify the mighty name of Yahweh, realized in Jesus while honoring his presence in our midst. Nevertheless, worship without intimacy is denying the triune God who “graciously invites us as the adopted children of God into an ever-deepening and joyous experience of friendship and fellowship with Father, Son and Holy Spirit,” as Tozer eloquently

states.⁸ This “ordering” of worship is in keeping with the Westminster Catechism which declares that our chief end and purpose is to “glorify God and enjoy him forever.”⁹

To establish an appropriate theology of intimate worship, we will first examine the plan for worship by employing a brief Old Testament survey, discovering that intimacy has always been crucial to God. Next, we will consider how one realizes intimacy through trinitarian worship, as it is only through the unique workings of each member of the Trinity that this is actualized. Finally, what one can expect intimate worship to accomplish will be presented as we uncover its transformative nature. In each of these, a mixture of contemporary and classical theological voices informs the discussion.

Designed for Intimate Worship

According to the biblical narrative, it has always been God’s intent to live among his people through the interaction of worship. As God reveals himself and his desire to know and be known (Jer. 31:33–34; Amos 3:2; Gal. 4:9), our response to him is what characterizes worship. John Jefferson Davis elaborates in the context of the account at Mount Sinai:

It is God who has “called the meeting” at his own initiative, not the people; true worship is seen to be a believing and obedient response to God’s prior word of revelation in the context of the covenant established by God: I will be your God,

⁸ A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New Delhi, IN: Digital Fire, 2019), 176.

⁹ Samuel Willard et al., *A Compleat Body of Divinity in Two Hundred and Fifty Expository Lectures on the Assembly’s Shorter Catechism : Wherein the Doctrines of the Christian Religion Are Unfolded, Their Truth Confirm’d, Their Excellence Display’d, Their Usefulness Improv’d, Contrary Errors & Vices Refuted & Expos’d, Objections Answer’d, Controversies Settled, Cases of Conscience Resolv’d; and a Great Light Thereby Reflected on the Present Age* (Boston in New-England: Printed by B. Green and S. Kneeland for B. Eliot and D. Henchman ..., 1726), Q. 1, 1, accessed May 4, 2020, <http://archive.org/details/compleatbodyofdi00will>.

and you will be my people, and I will dwell among you. God is the central actor in biblical worship, not the people; the people assemble at God's command, and they respond to his actions and directive words.¹⁰

God continually reveals himself to people, first on a metalevel through all of creation as general revelation (Rom. 1:20), more specifically in the Old Testament to the people he called to himself, the Israelites, and even more intimately to the leaders and prophets of his chosen. After God announces his covenant with the Israelites, who are to be set apart as a "kingdom of priests" (Exod. 19:6) to reveal God to the rest of the world, it is ratified with the blood sacrifice of animals.¹¹ Yahweh then invites Moses and the chief representatives of Israel to come up the mountain where they "beheld God, and ate and drank," as they celebrate a meal of fellowship with Yahweh himself (Exod. 24:9–11). Still, it is only Moses, functioning as Israel's high priest, who is given the invitation to come nearer still to the presence of God (v. 2). As Moses responds, he spends the next 40 days and nights dwelling in the glory cloud, interacting with God himself (vv. 15–18). It is in his presence that God further reveals himself so that Moses would better know Yahweh and guide the people into becoming a community of worshipers acceptable to God; able to abide in his holiness.¹²

As Yahweh continues to reveal himself to the Israelites, leading them with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Neh. 9:12), the people learn to follow his presence and stay close. When the Israelites see Yahweh's presence hovering at the entrance to the

¹⁰ John Jefferson Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God: An Evangelical Theology of Real Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 100, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹¹ Daniel Isaac Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 43.

¹² John Risbridger, *The Message of Worship*, Bible Speaks Today (Nottingham, UK: IVP, 2015), 45.

tent of meeting, their response is to worship, each at their tent (Exod. 33:10). However, with Moses, Yahweh would meet “face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (v. 11). Indeed, God responds to Moses’ subsequent request to know him better by confirming that he knows Moses and proceeds to show him more of his glory (vv. 12–23). God’s activity viewed with Moses and the Israelites reflects Alvarado’s summation that God’s “role” in worship is neither “indifference or nonchalance. . . . [but] vibrant, active, and participatory. . . . which demonstrate[s] his desire for relationship.”¹³

God instructs them to build a tabernacle so there would be a place suitable for him to “dwell in their midst” (Exod. 25:8; Heb. 8:5).¹⁴ Just as the Garden reflected God’s heavenly home, the tabernacle was to be patterned after “heavenly things” (Heb. 8:5).¹⁵ Yahweh does indeed occupy it, filling and covering the tabernacle with his glory (Exod. 40:34–38). It is a move to “restore” what had been broken in the Fall and “recapture the wonderful and personal relationship Adam and Eve had with God in the garden.”¹⁶

Other accounts among ancient Israel strengthen the idea that God’s design is for people to encounter him relationally through worship. An intriguing pericope is the telling of Elisha, the prophet, inquiring of Yahweh on behalf of the three Kings of Israel, Judah, and Edom in 2 Kings 3:15–19. Elisha is annoyed with the king of Israel and

¹³ Johnathan E Bp Alvarado, “Worship in the Spirit: Pentecostal Perspectives on Liturgical Theology and Praxis,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 21, no. 1 (2012): 141, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials, EBSCOhost.

¹⁴ “Mishkan,” the most commonly used Hebrew word for tabernacle, means “dwelling place” and emphasizes the “presence of the occupant” rather than the structure itself. Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 14.

¹⁵ Daniel Hays points out nine features of the Garden “foreshadowing” the coming tabernacle and temple, but ultimately is an “archetype,” modeled after God’s dwelling place in the heavens. For the complete discussion, see pp. 20–27. Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 25.

¹⁶ Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 25.

proceeds to ask for a musician before prophesying, ostensibly, to enable him to better hear from the LORD. It is as the musician is playing that “the hand of the LORD came upon him” (v. 15). According to Spurgeon, Elisha realizes he is best able to receive from the Spirit of God “when the noise within his soul was hushed and every disturbing emotion was quieted . . . he naturally felt agitated, distressed, and unfit to be the mouthpiece for the Spirit of God.”¹⁷ This prophet who regularly hears Yahweh’s voice recognizes that quieting himself by worshiping through music would allow him to commune with God and hear his intimate, still small voice when he could not otherwise.

Music is the primary vehicle for praise in the Psalms, and as Risbridger poignantly observes, “their poetry and music open our hearts to God for his healing and blessing and lift our hearts to God for his glory and praise.”¹⁸ As possibly the most substantial biblical work providing endless inspiration for worshipers both then and now, the Psalms are timeless with their expressions of raw emotion. The range of sentiments includes those of duress, such as sincere regret, shame, and contrition (Pss. 38; 44; 51); sorrow, loneliness, and discouragement (Pss. 31; 25; 42); grief, brokenheartedness, and pain (Pss. 6; 34; 69); grief, fear, and anger (Pss. 6; 2; 4) and those of exuberance, such as love, desire, and hope (Pss. 18; 10; 33); awe, delight, and joy (Pss. 33; 1; 4); peace, thankfulness, and confidence (Pss. 4; 35; 27). These emotions appear shameless and somewhat “politically incorrect” as they make no attempt to hide what the psalmist is feeling in order to “put on” what may be considered a more acceptable front. On the contrary, these Psalms seem intended to awaken our emotions and bring before Yahweh

¹⁷ Holman Bible Staff, *KJV Spurgeon Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 97.

¹⁸ Risbridger, *The Message of Worship*, 63.

the unadulterated version of how the worshiper genuinely feels. And while the joyous Psalms evidently exhibit praise and worship of God, “negative” emotion Psalms acknowledge the pursuit of him in the midst of heart-wrenching circumstances choosing authenticity over show while holding on to the never-ending sovereignty of God.¹⁹

The Psalms also yield prophetic glimpses of how relational worship and the presence of God are inextricably intertwined. The Psalmist effusively describes his delight of worshiping in the presence of the LORD, which is better to have for one day than “a thousand elsewhere” (Ps. 84:10). According to Ps. 100, it is praise and worship that admits worshipers into the house of the LORD, allowing one to enter “his presence with singing” (v. 2) because of his goodness, continual love, and faithfulness (v. 5). As emphasized in Pss. 95:2 and 100:4, it is with praise and worship that worshipers enter his presence and experience his accompanying character. Both Psalms remind his people to praise because of relationship; Yahweh is their God, and they are his, cared for as sheep in his pasture.

Psalm 149 is a hymn which continually uses language to reinforce “the faithful” (vv. 1, 5, 9) as belonging to Yahweh yielding a blueprint for authentic worship and what one can expect it to accomplish. Israel, with the connotation of being “children” belonging to “their king,” is understood as a familial community continually cared for and delighted in by Yahweh. As his people rejoice in the honor and joy of belonging to Yahweh through music and dance (v. 3), the Psalmist exhorts them to worship in the most intimate of places—their bed chamber (v. 5). Michael Barré deduces that this imagery conveys worshiping with the sincerest of emotions residing in one’s heart as

¹⁹ Carol M. Bechtel, ed., *Touching the Altar: The Old Testament for Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 160.

opposed to outward ritualistic activity.²⁰ Many theologians conclude from the text that it is in this place of intimacy that worshipers are to sing the high praises of God wielded as a sword (vv. 5–6).²¹ That sword of worship then becomes a potent weapon to subjugate the unseen spiritual forces in rebellion to God coming against his people.

No theological exploration of intimate worship would be complete without highlighting the life of King David, whom God considered “a man after his own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22) and is oft considered the most prolific writer of the Psalms. Before David was king, he was a mere shepherd in the fields caring for his father’s flocks. It was in the loneliness of those hills and valleys that he learned to commune with the God of those hills and valleys, meditating on him as he worshiped in solitude with the lyre, sheep, and Yahweh as his only companions. One can imagine how the 23rd Psalm came to be written—perhaps the most famous Psalm of all time—as David walked with the LORD as his shepherd, lovingly caring for each of his sheep and leading them to safety amid overwhelming darkness and adversity.

Characterizing himself as “inspired by the Spirit of God in his poetic expression” (2 Sam. 23:1–3),²² David’s intimate connection with God is evident in his emotionally-laden Psalms as well as in other accounts. It is as David played the lyre for Saul that Saul received relief from the evil spirit sent to torment him.²³ The closeness of that connection between David and the LORD could not help but impact the oppressed Saul, who had to

²⁰ Michael L. Barré, “Hearts, Beds, and Repentance in Psalm 4,5 and Hosea 7,14,” *Biblica* 76, no. 1 (1995): 54, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials, EBSCOhost.

²¹ Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter*, 103.

²² Block, *For the Glory of God*, 228.

²³ Block, *For the Glory of God*, 228.

merely listen to the musical by-product to have the darkness within him dispelled. In another instance, David returned the Ark of the Covenant—the presence of Yahweh—to Jerusalem, caught up with the joy of the LORD so that he unashamedly “danced before him with all his might;” less concerned with his reputation and appearance than expressing his joy before the LORD (2 Sam. 6:14, 21–22). It seems apparent that the depth of David’s connection with God in worship helped to foster a heightened awareness of his presence and his accompanying characteristics.

Interestingly enough, the Bible conveys that it is not humans alone who utilize music as a means of expressing joy, gladness, love, and exultation in this relationship—emotions often associated with people for God. Zephaniah 3 looks forward to the day when Yahweh will redeem and restore Israel revealing the LORD himself sings over us; “The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing” (v. 17). When confronted with such love, how can his people, as his *imago dei*, not return the same unrestrained affection? The prophet instructs the people, “Sing aloud . . . ! Rejoice and exult with all your heart . . . ! The LORD, is in your midst” (vv. 14–15). These are both exuberant and intimate expressions of emotion that the Israelites were to receive and respond to with identical sentiments as they anticipated and then encountered the presence of Yahweh among them. Ultimately, this scene would be fulfilled in the new covenant as God’s presence permanently resides with his people, and he exults “in the redemption and return of his lost children.”²⁴

²⁴ Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 57.

As Christians now living in the age of that new covenant, we have the benefit of his Holy Spirit residing within us, granting us Yahweh's continual presence as he imparts deliverance and tender love while rejoicing and exulting over us. We can finally have all barriers removed in experiencing true worship with our Creator. Nevertheless, it would be remiss to deem worship before the New Covenant as merely outward. As Block reminds us, although Old Testament "worship focused on place and external expressions. . . . the heart and life of a person provided the lens through which their worship was evaluated" and ultimately accepted or rejected.²⁵ Ladd reminds us that the recitation of "the šema" with its call to love God with the whole heart" was "at the heart of first-century Jewish personal devotion as well as the synagogue worship," although their view that this was performed in submission to God's rule rendered it somewhat external.²⁶ Nevertheless, judging the worship of Israel as invalid effectively "deny[ies] the true worshipers in Israel the hope that YHWH offered them with his gracious revelation."²⁷ When we minimize the revelation of God in ancient Israel, we also minimize the magnitude of what it means that a holy God has persistently sought to relate to us on a personal level.

Intimacy through Trinitarian Worship

A fifteenth-century Russian monk and theologian, St. Andrei Rublev created a now-famous icon known as *The Trinity* or *The Hospitality of Abraham*. In it, he depicts the members of the Trinity sitting in fellowship at a square table. The posture of each

²⁵ Block, *For the Glory of God*, 16. Consider Cain and Abel as representative.

²⁶ Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 542.

²⁷ Block, *For the Glory of God*, 5.

reflects the invitational process welcoming a person into that union, beginning with the Father, moving through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. On the fourth side, between the Spirit and the Father, are elements representing the Eucharist as though offered to the empty place. The implication is every person is given a seat at the table in fellowship with the Trinity by receiving and feasting on the sacrificial work of Jesus, indicating it is through Communion that one gains that privilege. Reflecting on the incredible wonder of that should leave the worshiper breathless and humbled to worship all the more.

The advent of Jesus ushered in a new kingdom in which he taught that worshipers would now “worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). Ladd expounds that worship would be “empowered by the Spirit of God. . . . Because Jesus has come into the world from above, he has instituted a new order of things.”²⁸ It is now through the truth realized in the person of Jesus that worshipers gain access to God. Ladd posits that “worship in truth” and “worship in spirit” are synonymous as “worship [is] mediated through the person of Jesus, and inspired by the Holy Spirit.”²⁹ Under this new covenant, the role of each member of the Trinity has been activated allowing us to participate in the “ceaseless love and mutual delight” within the glorious presence.³⁰ Indeed, it is only through the work of each that acceptable worship and communion with Yahweh is possible.

We have been invited into this “divine dance” by the Father who initiated the plan, devising a way for us to be connected with the triune God as worshipers.³¹ He is the

²⁸ Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 261.

²⁹ Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 328.

³⁰ Risbridger, *The Message of Worship*, 33.

³¹ Richard Rohr, Mike Morrell, and William Paul Young, *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2020).

“ultimate person to whom thanks (hence worship) is directed,” as all of creation perceives his glory.³² Risbridger clarifies that it is Yahweh himself who first delights in his own incomparable glory. His invitation for us to experience that same joy found in his glory can only be considered an act of “divine love.” He has created us to “delight in what he delights in and reflect his glory in creation. To miss this calling to infinite joy and to squander our lives in the pursuit of lesser joys is the greatest tragedy of all.”³³

It is in the name of Jesus through the Spirit that our worship is deemed acceptable to the Father. Paul lays out this worship framework in Ephesians, writing that we are to “be filled with the Spirit . . . giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 5:18–20). Through Jesus, the Church—the continuation of true Israel and the seed of Abraham (Rom. 11; Gal. 3:29)—is being constructed as a new living temple (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19–22) and the city of God where his presence dwells (Rev. 21:2, 9–23). No longer dependent on a physical temple and the holy of holies to experience the presence of God in worship, Christians can now approach the throne of the Almighty with confidence. This is only accomplished through Jesus, our high priest (Heb. 2:17, 4:14), who has become the cornerstone (Acts 4:11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:4–7). In him, the Son of Man and Son of God, the restoration of our relationship with God initially broken in the Fall is made possible. Jesus as the fulfillment of Israelite worship is “the ultimate ‘epiphany’ of man as

³² J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology: The Church, the Kingdom, and Last Things* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 103.

³³ Risbridger, *The Message of Worship*, 33.

worshiping being, the fulness of God's manifestation and presence by means of the world."³⁴

Even so, without the Holy Spirit being released to all believers at Pentecost, we could not readily access communion with God. Tozer writes that it was "at Pentecost [that] the glory descended on the church and has never left. . . . It is a continuous reality as God is filling the church with all the fulness of God (Eph. 1:22–23)."³⁵ This is a fulfillment of Jesus' earlier promise to his disciples that they would be intimately united with him and the Father, as well as the Holy Spirit, as each would be making their home within them (John 14:15–31). In essence, this is a "gracious invitation" to join the "ever-deepening friendship and fellowship with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. . . . that has existed since before the beginning of time."³⁶ This "trinitarian reality" is the privilege of every believer in Christ to experience "true worship on earth [as] the beginning of a never-ending journey in the very heart of the Trinity."³⁷

It is very God residing in individuals in the person of the Holy Spirit that initiates worship back to the Father. Paul instructs the church in Philippi to "worship by the Spirit of God" (Phil. 3:3) describing the agency of the Holy Spirit. It is he who inspires the very worship offered, "and the more that inspiration is present, the more fully God is glorified."³⁸ As worshipers grasp this truth, they will be all the more eager to take hold of Paul's exhortation to "be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18) as "it is his presence that

³⁴ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2010), 122, Kindle.

³⁵ Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 197.

³⁶ Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 76.

³⁷ Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 177.

³⁸ Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 103.

imparts spiritual life to our hearts . . . stirs hunger for Christ in our hearts (John 16:14–15) . . . [and] moves our hearts towards holiness so that our worship becomes transformational and not self-indulgent.”³⁹ It is his continual work in believers that is designed for them to experience not just his “(singular) presence,” but as Risbridger interprets Paul’s prayer in Eph. 3:19, the “fullness of the whole of the Holy Trinity.”⁴⁰

Thus, as worshipers, the ontological framework should be trinitarian theism, which “places the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, at the center of the universe as the ultimately and eternally real,” according to John Jefferson Davis. He argues that this trinitarian ontological mindset is the correct biblical orientation in contrast with contemporary competing ontological orientations, such as modernity (scientific naturalism) and postmodernity (the digital universe, simulations, virtual realities). Truly, worshipers need an orientation that recognizes they are approaching a completely holy God in worship. They must grasp, as John Jefferson Davis explains, “the heaviness of God, in the sense that the eternal, self-existent great *I AM* of the Bible, who is the source of all existence and all reality, is the most intensely real being in the universe.” Held in tension is the reality that this same God is equally “joyful, beautiful, relational and available—a God who is to be praised and enjoyed, now and forever.”⁴¹

We get a glimpse into how the early church engaged in trinitarian worship by turning to two passages in the Pauline epistles: Eph. 5:18–21 and Col. 3:16–17. As previously mentioned, the apostle Paul exhorts the church in Ephesus to be “filled with

³⁹ Risbridger, *The Message of Worship*, 209.

⁴⁰ Risbridger, *The Message of Worship*, 247.

⁴¹ John Jefferson Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God: An Evangelical Theology of Real Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 33, accessed March 24, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central.

the Spirit” rather than “drunk with wine” (Eph. 5:18) as they worship. Ruthven posits that this rather common comparison in the biblical narrative could be given due to “the similarity of responses of intense emotion.”⁴² As the people of God approach him in worship, Paul seems to be implying that one must “nurture a relationship of expectant openness to the Holy Spirit . . . as a continuing expectation of his powerful presence being among his people.” In other words, it is a choice one must make to be “totally given over to the Spirit . . . filled by/with the Spirit's own presence that they come to know God in all his fullness and reflect such in the way they live in relationship to one another and to God himself.”⁴³ We see that this is a matter of intentionality and pursuit in allowing the Holy Spirit to fill every part. One should not expect this filling to occur automatically as “he comes to the hungry not to the self-satisfied; he comes in response to the prayers of God’s people.”⁴⁴ Risbridger reinforces this relational aspect enumerating that the Holy Spirit is “a *dynamic* Spirit with whom the people of God are to cultivate a continuing relationship of expectancy, dependence, openness and joy.”⁴⁵

The nearly identical teaching by Paul in Col. 3:16 replaces “be filled with the Spirit” with “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” Paul is highlighting the necessity of the word of the Son abiding within and in their midst “play[ing] the central role,”

⁴² Jon Mark Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic on Post-Biblical Miracles*, rev. ed. (Tulsa, OK: Word & Spirit Press, 2011), 147.

⁴³ Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 722.

⁴⁴ Risbridger, *The Message of Worship*, 248.

⁴⁵ Risbridger, *The Message of Worship*, 241.

while the Spirit instigates the response of praise to the Father.⁴⁶ It is the Spirit who communicates the living word of God while filling believers with himself. In order to receive the treasures found in his word, it is vital that worshipers are grounded in and regularly meditate on it as he will often speak and minister by bringing scripture to mind during times of worship. Richly dwelling on his word together with "the anointing of the Holy Spirit make[s] a fellowship of believers into a community" who can teach, exhort and encourage one another.⁴⁷

Both passages emphasize worshiping through three types of singing—"psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" from the heart (Eph. 5:18; Col. 3:16). Williams agrees with many theologians that "psalms" most likely refers to those found in the Old Testament, "hymns," as songs of worship familiar to the worshiping community, and "spiritual songs," as those of a "spontaneous" nature inspired by the Spirit of God.⁴⁸ Fee convincingly argues that "spiritual" does not refer to the inner man, the religious, or "nonmaterial" as in a mystical sense according to Paul's usage of it, but instead, an adjective that "refers primarily to the Spirit of God."⁴⁹ Thus, "spiritual songs" are "a kind of charismatic hymnody," usually spontaneously offered before the congregation to God.⁵⁰ All three types of praise songs are vital to the health and growth of the church. As

⁴⁶ Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 657. Fee's argument is persuasive in laying out the reasons why this text is geared toward the gathered community rather than merely the individual. For a more complete discussion, see pg. 649.

⁴⁷ Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 113.

⁴⁸ Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 1992, 93.

⁴⁹ Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 32.

⁵⁰ James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 238.

“praise is the foundation and hallmark of true worship,” the worshipping community should relish that time as they move from one type of praise to another in glorifying God and allowing him to reveal himself to and through them.⁵¹ That worshipers are to sing from the heart indicates giving “the whole of ourselves to the worship of God, choosing to lift our hearts to him as we sing his praise.”⁵²

Viewed in conjunction, both passages convey that as believers abide in the presence and message of Christ in great abundance filled with the fullness of the Spirit, songs of worship burst forth to the edification of others and the praise of God. As worshipers participate in this remarkable trinitarian activity, the glory of God is also revealed through us to others, further inspiring praise and building up the worshipping community. Together, these Pauline teachings communicate pursuing a full and intimate connection with the Trinity as a model for worshipers. As the early church participated in vibrant trinitarian worship “characterized by its singing; so also in every generation where there is renewal by the Spirit a new hymnody breaks forth.”⁵³

Intimate Worship is Transformative

There is, perhaps, no greater picture of intimacy and trust than a child interacting with their parent. The child holds nothing back in relating how they feel—good or bad—and displays ultimate trust as they look to their mother or father to care for them. Jesus uses this analogy with his disciples as he tells them they must become like a child to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:3; Mark 10:14). It is children who demonstrate faith and

⁵¹ Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 93.

⁵² Risbridger, *The Message of Worship*, 250.

⁵³ Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 656.

humility without pretentiousness, as is prevalent in adulthood. Perhaps it is for this very reason that God has established the praise of children to defeat the enemy (Ps. 8:2).

After Jesus performs miracles of healing in the temple and is lauded by children crying out blessings and praises to him as the “Son of David,” Jesus responds to the Jewish leaders’ indignation by quoting Ps. 8:2 (Matt. 21:14–16). As these youth unabashedly acknowledge the truth of Jesus as the Messiah ushering in the kingdom of God, they are—even unknowingly—announcing the redemption of people and the restoration of God’s creation. It is through his children, humbly trusting in the name of Jesus that Yahweh chooses to defeat those in opposition to him. The Psalmist conveys that “God needs not strong military forces to destroy the ungodly; instead of these, the mouths of children are sufficient for his purpose.”⁵⁴ Indeed, it is not through myriads of hostile heavenly forces that Yahweh defeats the enemy, but through the mouths of children who are in alignment with the glory of God. As worshipers of all ages encounter the supreme goodness of God displayed in Jesus, they have the opportunity to express unadult-erated affection and exuberance for him with “vibrant, wholehearted and energetic praise . . . without reservation.”⁵⁵

Paul and Silas experience this truth in the depths of a dark prison cell as they sing songs of praise and worship to God, unashamedly, seemingly unconcerned in that midnight hour whom they might disturb (Acts 16:25). The text reveals that it was while they were singing that the very “foundations of the prison were shaken” and every prison door opened, and all the prisoners’ shackles came loose (v. 26). The jailer prepares to end

⁵⁴ John Calvin and James Anderson, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 5 vols. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 98.

⁵⁵ Risbridger, *The Message of Worship*, 106.

his life until Paul reassures him no one has fled. Consequently, the jailer and his entire household put their faith in Jesus. While there is much to glean from this pericope, only a few summations will be noted as they relate to transforming worship: (1) Regardless of circumstances, God is faithful and worthy of unreserved praise—Paul and Silas acknowledge this truth choosing to praise so all can hear; (2) Yahweh brings present physical help, seemingly in response to their worship; (3) The atmosphere set by worship remains calm amid a prison filled with convicts and external chaos—enough so, that no one flees; (4) Those in similar circumstances benefit from their praise, hearing the gospel and experiencing the miraculous God at work; (5) Not only physical shackles were released in their worship, but spiritual ones also, as the jailer and his entire household found real freedom in Christ. Reflecting on the effects of Paul and Silas’ praise should encourage and prompt all believers to fill their homes and cities with continual worship!

While the ultimate victory is assured, a daily battle remains to be fought in this present age as the people of God join in praying for his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.⁵⁶ The “god of this age,” Satan, is in rebellion to the plans and purposes of God whose “main objective is to frustrate the redemptive purposes of God, [as he] seeks to turn believers away from the gospel (1 Thess. 3:5), hinder God’s servants in their ministry (1 Thess. 2:18) . . . [and] overwhelm God’s people (Eph. 6:11, 12, 16).”⁵⁷ Ultimately, the people of Yahweh will experience the continual reign of God in his kingdom without sin, worry, or any evil influences in the age to come. Until that time, as

⁵⁶ Eldon Ladd gives an in-depth framework for the juxtaposition between “This Age” and “The Age to Come” representing the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of God. George Eldon Ladd, *Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1959), 22–141.

⁵⁷ Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 440.

Ladd explains, “God’s reign manifests itself both in the future and in the present and thereby creates both a future realm and a present realm in which men [*sic*] may experience the blessings of His reign.”⁵⁸

When his fully surrendered people praise, they are submitting to the rule of God and seeking him to reign over every aspect of their lives, thereby thwarting the devious plans of the enemy. It is in that place of worship, taking hold of the authority given by Jesus to his followers (Mark 16: 17–18; Luke 10:19, 9:1) that believers are especially able to access the power of the kingdom of God. Those who serve in vibrant healing ministries know the importance of this truth, often investing significant time in worship before ministry begins—not because they need to plead with God, but because, as Ruthven elaborates, “the more we enter his presence, the more aligned we become with his will and resulting power.”⁵⁹ Dick Eastman’s definition of worship is especially applicable here: “worship is any act, thought or expression of willful adoration that exalts and enthrones God, thereby defeating and dethroning Satan.”⁶⁰

As mentioned previously, Ps. 149 instructs worshipers to worship from a place of rest and intimacy and to take up the “high praises of God . . . and two-edged swords” (v. 6). These are not physical swords but the praises of God as a literal “sword of mouths” brandished against the enemies of God as a means of subjugation so that all may worship

⁵⁸ Ladd, “A Theology of the New Testament,” 24.

⁵⁹ Jon Mark Ruthven, *What’s Wrong with Protestant Theology? Tradition vs. Biblical Emphasis* (Tulsa, OK: Word & Spirit Press, 2013), 160.

⁶⁰ Dick Eastman, *Heights of Delight: An Invitation to Intercessory Worship*, rev. ed. (Ventura, CA: Baker Pub Group, 2002), 31.

Yahweh.⁶¹ For, as Paul reminds believers, “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). Swords of praise can certainly be victorious against these forces as “the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:4). Indeed, it is the glorious privilege of the redeemed to take up their position as humble praise warriors, honored “to put them in their place, to chastise them for their attitudes and get them to see the truth about their position in the world and before Yhwh.”⁶²

The worshiper becomes supremely aware of these unseen spiritual realities as their orientation is grounded in trinitarian ontology. For, it is as one worships that they are lifted into the heavenly realms, “seated with Christ” (Eph. 2:6) in the “heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb. 12:22). This “mystical and covenantal personal bond with the Lord,” allows the worshiper to step into what Tozer calls, “kairos, redemptive time” in which “the ‘already’ of the kingdom . . . [is] beginning to be experienced (Heb. 6:5).”⁶³ Thus, the worshiper experiences the reality of heaven, becoming “more aligned . . . with his will and resulting power.”⁶⁴ This spiritual transcendence is the ontic dual reality experienced in worship as the kingdom of God breaks in on this present world. Alvarado describes the

bifurcation between two distinct localities wherein worship is to be performed, yet . . . [with] one goal and important outcome. That outcome is the invocation of

⁶¹ Joshua Berman, “The ‘Sword of Mouths’ (Jud. III. 16; Ps. CXLIX 6; Prov. V 4): A Metaphor and Its Ancient Near Eastern Context,” *Vetus Testamentum* 52, no. 3 (2002): 292, JSOR Journals, EBSCOhost For a more complete analysis, see this author’s chapter, “Biblical Foundations.”

⁶² Goldingay, *Psalms, Volume 3*, 742.

⁶³ Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 93.

⁶⁴ Ruthven, *What’s Wrong*, 160.

the presence and dominion of God everywhere the Church gathers for worship. . . . It seems that within the context of worship heaven realizes its desire to overlay earthly conditions with supernatural realities. It is that application of the divine onto the human condition that transforms the lives of worshipers and spiritually forms them into new creatures.⁶⁵

In this place of encounter with the real presence of God experienced in worship, the worshiper is being transformed from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18). Scripture teaches that people become like the one they worship “as imaging beings” and will either “reflect the Creator or . . . some other image of the idolatrous world to which they are committed.”⁶⁶ Accordingly, transformation occurs as the people of God, made in his image, turn to him “with unveiled face” (16–18), imagery depicting no barriers between the worshiper and the Lord. One can now worship in the liberty of the Spirit of the Lord as he supplies the “freedom for unscripted expression,” allowing the people of God to be in his presence without pretense.⁶⁷ Thus, as God finds a pliant, yearning heart for him, he is all the more able to mold the worshiper to better reflect his image and work in them for sanctification.

As hearts are stirred in face-to-face worship, the Father reveals areas of concern and needs on his heart, inviting worshipers to join him in caring for them. This prompting is a call to both intercession and action. As one sees the world through the eyes of the Kingdom, they naturally begin to intercede from that position of seeing “the world in Christ, as it really is, and not from our particular and therefore limited and partial points

⁶⁵ Alvarado, “Worship in the Spirit,” 144.

⁶⁶ G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 16; 291, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁶⁷ Alvarado, “Worship in the Spirit,” 144.

of view.”⁶⁸ In gaining his perspective, one can more effectively pray in agreement with the triune God as he impresses where and how he’s working. Schmemmann astutely notes, “it is the very joy of the Kingdom that makes us remember the world and pray for it. It is the very communion with the Holy Spirit that enables us to love the world with the love of Christ.”⁶⁹

As worshipers align with God’s character and love, his call to mission for each one becomes clearer. According to Miroslav Volf, immersion in the adoration of God is a “well-spring of action.”⁷⁰ On this area of mission in action, Meyers writes that when the assembly is fully engaged, as it “embodies and inhabits worship . . . worship turns outward, for the sake of the world.”⁷¹ Clayton Schmit is in agreement, noting that “there is no such thing as an adjournment of worship.” Instead, worship always begins with adoration which then becomes “inside out” and missional as one encounters the love of Jesus in its “inward reaching.”⁷² The more an individual or congregation can receive that love, the greater that love can also reach through them to impact their greater community. Cartledge explains that receiving that love happens through an

experience of intimacy with God such that individuals are transformed and empowered in their Christian discipleship. This “pull” into an intense and often dramatic set of experiences is followed by a “push” outward in missionary love and service. The dynamic experience of being loved by God and loving God in

⁶⁸ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 44.

⁶⁹ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 44.

⁷⁰ Ruth A Meyers, *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission: Gathering as God’s People, Going out in God’s Name*, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2014), 31, EBSCOhost.

⁷¹ Meyers, *Missional Worship*, 39.

⁷² Clayton J Schmit, “Sent and Gathered: A Musical Metaphor for Missional Liturgy,” *Word & World* 26, no. 2 (2006): 126, 128, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials, EBSCOhost.

return produces what is often called “love energy,” which leads to a propulsion out into loving service toward the wider community and society.⁷³

Conclusion

As this theological review has outlined, it has always been and continues to be God’s design to relate to his people without barriers, from a place of intimacy. This theology of intimate worship is foundational to the doctoral project as it reveals its primacy in relating to him in worship. In learning God’s priority for intimate worship, how that intimacy is realized and what one can expect it to accomplish, the essentiality of each is apparent to the hypothesis; participants who are taught to engage in vulnerable and authentic musical worship with an expectation of encountering the Spirit of the Lord will relay one or more of the following: a heightened awareness of his presence with its accompanying characteristics, such as love, joy, peace and faith; physical and/or emotional healing; an increased desire to engage in worship; and a greater sense of purpose and freedom in worship.

Yahweh is seeking to strongly support a people whose hearts are fully his (2 Chron. 16:9). He is searching for those who are not ashamed to be vulnerable before him as a King David, who laid bare his emotions before Yahweh in worship. The Creator himself has laid bare his emotions and his life to his *imago dei*. It is now up to each one to respond in kind by stripping off every encumbrance keeping him at a distance. Still, abandon before him leaves one feeling exposed and vulnerable, reluctant to remove

⁷³ Mark J. Cartledge, *The Mediation of the Spirit: Interventions in Practical Theology*, Pentecostal Manifestos Series (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 106, accessed April 5, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central.

barriers. Nevertheless, it is these very protective shields that also result in shielding one from the loving care of the Father.

Through this study of intimate worship, the vitality of music as a vehicle for worship is made apparent. As melodies provide the means for exuberant dancing before the LORD, and songs provide a poetic medium for the expression of joy or angst, so Yahweh has given this gift of music, thus adding dimensionality to communication. It can touch the raw and hidden places of the soul, opening one up to the healing balm of the Holy Spirit. Music becomes the ship on which worship journeys venturing into emotional harbors which otherwise remain unexplored.

Understanding the synergy of trinitarian worship should foster expectation to encounter the Spirit of the Lord accompanied by a desire to be filled with the fulness of the Holy Spirit. Without each member of the Trinity—the Father drawing each one, the Son, as the mediator of worship, and the Holy Spirit as one’s communion—worship would be relegated to Old Testament practices, governed by the Law. Instead, the Father provided the means to fulfill those restrictions that his children might experience him regardless of location or circumstances. Without the real presence of the Holy Spirit, companioning on any level with the triune God is an impossibility. Indeed, “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17). Freedom to love. Freedom from shame or embarrassment. Freedom for each to be the unique person he designed in his image.

Expecting to encounter God’s presence in worship also means honoring his presence. With the Holy Spirit as an active participant—indeed, the very impetus of the people’s praise—the worshiping community should recognize the reality of his activity

among the people. Thomas Schattauer observes this prevalence in the Pentecostal tradition with “its unstructured approach to worship in which the Holy spirit is trusted to prompt not only the contents of the service but also its sequence. . . . The real emphasis in worship is on the immediacy of the Spirit.” He also notes that this awareness of the Spirit’s presence and activity empowers people to live in a hope not constrained by present realities.⁷⁴ No matter the denomination or tradition, congregations need to leave space for the Holy Spirit to move among the participants as he fills the interior of the worshiper and the collective body. Worship that fails to honor his presence might as well be to a far-off deity who views the world from a distance—with no help for the weary and broken.

As worshipers, one can approach him with the realization that his desire for intimacy is from a place of deep love as a Father. When one comes to him with abandon, both in body and heart, not withholding anything from him, he penetrates the secret places one may have been keeping from him. What once was hidden is exposed to his gentle and healing light. The worshiper becomes malleable as clay to his potter's hand that he may shape them closer to his image. As worshipers grasp the beauty of his healing touch, they can more easily be vulnerable and authentic, allowing real intimacy.

Considering the transformative aspects of intimate worship should motivate individuals and the worshiping community to relate to God without barriers. As Yahweh pours out his mercy, one may come under conviction as the Spirit reveals thoughts, attitudes, and actions that are out of sync with his. As the Father showers worshipers with

⁷⁴ Thomas H. Schattauer, “God’s Mission and the Christian Assembly: The Search for an Alternative Practice of Worship,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 50, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 149, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials, EBSCOhost.

joy, hope rises, giving new strength to face whatever challenges are ahead, as well as breaking off sadness, despair, and even depression. As God confirms his faithfulness, the worshiper gains courage and fortitude to pursue the promises God has previously revealed. As he pours out his love, his children are reminded of who they are, resulting in the desire to draw closer still and be conformed to his image. The Father knows what the worshiper needs and reveals himself accordingly to minister to each. How in tune one is with him will impact how well they receive his ministrations; the more surrendered one is in his presence, the more fertile the ground is to "receive with meekness the implanted word" (Js. 1:21).

Knowing his people are to walk in victory through unity with the triune God should spur one to connect with him in worship all the more. The ontic reality of being seated with him in heavenly places assures ultimate victory and brings peace when weary from battle. This perspective shift promotes confidence in trusting his plans, reminding each one who they are in him. The confirmation of their identity as heirs to the throne buoys confidence as they walk in their authority, experiencing the powers of the kingdom of God realized through worship.⁷⁵ As we experience his kingdom in relating with him in intimacy, we are also being transformed from glory to glory which was also a part of his plan in how he designed our very bodies.

⁷⁵ Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 96.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction: Neuroplasticity and Worship

Until the last few decades, it was thought that our brains had a finite number of cells that would begin to die off by early adulthood. However, research in the mid-twentieth century revealed the truth that adult brains continue to form new connections and the field of neuroplasticity was born. Neuroplasticity can be defined as, “The brain's ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections throughout life.”¹ Accordingly, as long as brain activity remains, neuroplasticity is possible, as is—even more incredulously—neurogenesis, when the brain actually grows new neurons.

Extraordinary discoveries in neuroscience show that what we pay attention to and how we interact with it greatly impact brain function and behavioral responses. Since our brains can be considered the control or distribution center for messages sent throughout our bodies, neural function affects one's mental and physical health. The nature of brain malleability gives one the power to rewire their brain and see the world differently as desired emotions are cultivated.²

¹ William C. Shiel Jr., MD, “Definition of Neuroplasticity,” *MedicineNet*, <https://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=40362>.

² Courtney E. Ackerman, “What Is Neuroplasticity? A Psychologist Explains [+14 Exercises],” *PositivePsychology.Com*, last modified July 25, 2018, <https://positivepsychology.com/neuroplasticity/>.

This exciting field has significant implications for other disciplines as investigation continues into how new neural pathways and connections between those pathways are formed. As such, neurotheology and the neuroscience of music have emerged exploring the fundamental nature of spirituality and music. Neurotheology is concerned with understanding “the relationship between the brain and theology,” and has demonstrated a correlation between certain spiritual practices and positive neurological changes.³ Neuroplasticity is the underlying mechanism supporting the neuroscience of music and its relative, music therapy, an intervention which seeks “to improve, restore, or maintain a non-music-related behavior in a patient or client.”⁴

These disciplines form the basis for this interdisciplinary research utilizing the scientific integration model. Indeed, neuroplasticity, seen through the lens of neurotheology and the neuroscience of music is considered appropriate and advantageous to informing the research project as each reveal the positive impact of contemplating God and musical participation on neural activity. They show the scientific basis underlying the importance of what the Bible repeatedly instructs all people to do—worship God in song and to be transformed “by the renewal of your mind.” When viewed together, a picture emerges supporting the hypothesis that participants who are taught to engage in vulnerable and authentic musical worship with an expectation of encountering the Spirit of the Lord will relay one or more of the following: a heightened awareness of his presence with its accompanying characteristics, such as love, joy, peace and faith;

³ Kirk Bingaman, “The Promise of Neuroplasticity for Pastoral Care and Counseling,” *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 5 (October 2013): 550–551, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials, EBSCOhost.

⁴ Elizabeth L. Stegemöller, “Exploring the Mechanisms of Music Therapy,” *The Scientist Magazine*®, <https://www.the-scientist.com/features/exploring-the-mechanisms-of-music-therapy-31936>.

physical and/or emotional healing; an increased desire to engage in worship; and a greater sense of purpose and freedom in worship.

In delving into these vast and complex fields, we will highlight some basics of neuroplasticity and consider how the contemplation of God impacts the growth of healthy neural pathways and connections. The posture of worship as an expression of contemplation and gratitude will be explored as worship is an appropriate vehicle for both. How our emotions, thoughts and habits interwoven with worship affect neurobiochemical changes will also be highlighted as they influence healthy brain, mind, and bodily function.

We will also investigate music's unique ability to penetrate and impact neuronal activity in general as it relates to one's connection with God. Listening to music and, better yet, engaging in music-making has been correlated with growing new neurons, strengthening vital neural pathways, activating pleasure centers in our brain and ultimately, improving one's rate of healing.⁵ This research will also include a discussion on the formative nature of singing, its heightened impact when movement is added, and the increased benefits when shared with others.

It is important to note that neuroscience is a way of revealing what is occurring in the brain as we are transformed, as well as informing what might contribute to healthy transformation. In this study, we examine the natural means set in motion by the creator God to affect change. As we consider how neuroplasticity interacts with the various foundations of this project—biblical, historical, and theological—we recognize that the unknown spiritual activity of the Holy Spirit at work in one's life remains unquantifiable.

⁵ Stegemöller, "Exploring the Mechanisms."

Within that framework, what can be learned from neuroscience that would encourage the people of God to partner with his design in their transformation through worship? It is a valid distinction to make that we can put ourselves in position to be a prime subject for God's transformative power in our lives. Just as one may realize the importance of learning healthy eating and exercise while praying for God's healing from any disease, understanding how the brain's neural processes work helps to form environments conducive to God's activity in one's life.

Neuroplasticity in the Project: Transformative Encounters with God in Worship

Neuroplasticity by its very definition has to do with transformation. As new neural connections are established, others abandoned and fledging ones strengthened, the brain is ever-changing. Neurons are continually changing direction and position as they respond to outside stimuli, both positive and negative. It is God's very design that people be transformed—what kind of transformation one undergoes is a choice made by each person daily, whether knowingly or not.

A person's focus will greatly determine what type of neural changes are enacted. As one contemplates the vastness of God, multitudes of neurons fire as different dendrites form new associations—as well as severing old—and new imaginative perspectives emerge.⁶ Yet, how one interacts with God determines what part of the brain is engaged. For instance, the frontal lobe, dedicated to logical thinking, helps one grasp what it means that God is purposeful and caring, while the limbic system “creates an emotionally

⁶ Andrew B. Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain: Breakthrough Findings from a Leading Neuroscientist* (New York, NY: Random House Publishing Group, 2009), 16.

meaningful experience of God.”⁷ The idea that “we become what we worship” is especially poignant in light of our malleable brains promoting a sense of urgency to meet with God in worship.⁸ On this, Timothy Jennings expounds,

His Spirit is the Spirit of love and truth, and as we experience his love, our fear subsides. Rather than living selfishly, we seek to bless others. We actually make different choices, stemming from new motives, which increases wisdom and insight. This further develops the prefrontal cortex and calms the amygdala. Our fear level falls, and our confidence and peace grows. As we spend time with our God of love, we become more and more like him.⁹

Practicing a thankful heart in worship can result in an overall feeling of awareness and enhanced mood due to the increase in dopamine levels activated when one engages in gratitude.¹⁰ Dr. Caroline Leaf explains that as people worship God, focusing on his attributes in a way that receives his love, grace and personal care for their lives, their neural activity responds accordingly, shutting down unhealthy neural pathways and opening up new ones, redirecting the entire body. When one does so on a regular basis, the Quantum Zeno Effect (QZE)—“the repeated effort that causes learning to take place”—comes into play, stipulating that the brain shift according to whatever the mind is focused on.¹¹ Accordingly, remaining in a posture of worship and praise allows one to participate in their own continued healthy neurogenesis and neural activity leading to

⁷ Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 49.

⁸ Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 16.

⁹ Timothy R. Jennings, *The God-Shaped Brain: How Changing Your View of God Transforms Your Life*, expanded ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2017), 234.

¹⁰ Caroline Leaf, Peter Amua-Quarshie, and Robert Turner, *Think, Learn, Succeed: Understanding and Using Your Mind to Thrive at School, the Workplace, and Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018), 40.

¹¹ Dr Caroline Leaf, *Switch on Your Brain: The Key to Peak Happiness, Thinking, and Health*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 107–109.

increased physical well-being as the whole body attempts to come into alignment with healthy thought patterns.¹²

Indeed, how we think has incredible influence over our entire being, affecting our physical and emotional health, intelligence and cognition.¹³ Leaf discusses the ramifications of one's thought processes extensively, noting that what one is thinking at any given time is crucial, as "your thoughts determine the signals your genes receive. By changing your thoughts, you change your mindsets, and, in turn, you can influence and shape your own genetic readout." This makes sense when considering that genetic activity leading to physical well-being is mostly impacted by situations and choices made throughout one's life; mutations alone count for a mere five percent of one's health issues.¹⁴

As the *imago dei*, people are designed to be transformed and realize their best life by encountering God in worship. In particular, worship that integrates music has the advantage of maximizing the transformative principle inherent to the worship process. It operates under the Hebbian rule, which theorizes that "neurons that fire together, wire together. In other words, for two neurons to make a new connection or strengthen an existing one, they must fire action potentials synchronously."¹⁵ In simplified terms, the concurrent coordination of two different neural activities stimulate each other, acting as reinforcement. Music therapist Elizabeth Stegemöller explains the Hebbian rule in action:

¹² Leaf, *Switch on Your Brain*, 86

¹³ Leaf, Amua-Quarshie, and Turner, *Think, Learn, Succeed*, 34.

¹⁴ Leaf, Amua-Quarshie, and Turner, *Think, Learn, Succeed*, 41–42.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Stegemöller, "Music Therapy," *Scientist* 31, no. 3 (March 2017): 45, Complementary Index, EBSCOhost.

“by pairing music with activities such as movement, vocalization, breathing, and heart rate, music therapists may be eliciting simultaneous firing of neurons in brain areas involved in the control of those behaviors, strengthening neuronal connectivity and leading to faster and more-permanent changes in their patients.”¹⁶

Accordingly, as worshipers engage in gratitude, focusing their attention on God, while simultaneously singing in rhythm and even, perhaps, participating in some form of bodily movement, various neural functions are at work resulting in the synchronization of the various neural populations. As a result, the worshiper may experience heightened benefits in the brain’s reward center when compared to gratitude alone. Indeed, one’s perceived connection with God may also be reinforced accompanied by a greater awareness of the aspects of his nature that were the focus in worship.

Neuroplasticity in the Biblical Foundations: Psalm 149

As Psalm 149 establishes a biblical foundation for worship including the reason for it, a blueprint for engagement and what it accomplishes, neuroplasticity reveals some of its underlying science lending further credibility to the psalm as an appropriate model for worship. The transformation in neural pathways through partaking in expanded forms of worship such as demonstrated in the psalm has now been demonstrated in neuroscientific research. As one engages in worship by participating in music in all its forms, contemplating a good God and seeking to meet with him intimately, one’s brain is optimized to better connect with him and experience improvement in other areas of one’s life.

¹⁶ Stegemöller, “Exploring the Mechanisms.”

It is active, musical worship, filled with expressions of communal exaltation, dancing and raucous music-making alongside humility and intimacy, concluding with intensive tones of warfare that captures the attention of the psalmist. One might say that the psalmist had in mind what neuroscientists refer to as “environmental enrichment [EE] . . . saturated with novelty, focused attention, and challenge . . . , critical for promoting neuroplasticity.”¹⁷ Leo Chalupa speculates on the reason for the effectiveness of EE in “eliciting subtle physiological changes in the whole organism . . . affecting levels of hormones and growth factors” as partly due to its safe atmosphere in which “exploration and play are stimulated without the dangers and contingent necessities of life.” The purported benefits of EE are many and impressive including behavior modification, improvement in cognitive function, enhanced memory, decreased stress while increasing positive emotions, as well as aiding in the recovery of neurodegenerative diseases, psychosis, and various injuries to the brain.¹⁸ Certainly, such diverse expressions of worship as exhorted in Psalm 149 create a prime opportunity for EE.

The constructive effects of combining music with movement have long been noted and implemented in childhood development programs as well as in music therapy for all ages. Documented as enhancing positive neural connections, these strategies increase dopamine output and boost its synthesis while regulating its function.¹⁹

¹⁷ Ackerman, “What Is Neuroplasticity?”

¹⁸ Leo M. Chalupa, *Cerebral Plasticity: New Perspectives* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011), 7–8, EBSCOhost.

¹⁹ Kayo Akiyama and Den’etsu Sutoo, “Role of Musical Stimuli in Dopaminergic Brain Function,” in *Music: Social Impacts, Health Benefits and Perspectives*, ed. Tamas Szabo and Peti Simon (Hauppauge, N.Y.: Nova Science Publishers, Inc, 2013), 86–87, EBSCOhost.

Consequently, when acting together, music and movement serve to increase feelings of well-being, lessen pain and attenuate symptoms stemming from neurological disorders. When that combined music and movement—seen in Psalm 149 in the form of general merry-making, dancing and music-making with instrumentation and voices—is turned toward the LORD, the enhanced benefit to the worshiper’s brain and bodily functions is magnified as the neurons synergistically fire together in adding the crucial component of contemplating God.

Neuroscientist Andrew Newberg describes the metamorphosis occurring in the brain when contemplating God writing that “different circuits become activated, while others become deactivated. New dendrites are formed, new synaptic connections are made, and the brain becomes more sensitive to subtle realms of experience.”²⁰ He continues that the more one ponders God, the greater the alteration of the brain’s circuitry. In particular, the neural structure largely responsible for “social awareness and empathy,” which is also responsible for “subduing destructive feelings and emotions” is bolstered.²¹

It also turns out that how we contemplate God impacts the way the new circuitry is wired. While focusing on a vengeful and legalistic God may actually damage your brain,²² “worshiping a God of love actually stimulates the brain to grow and heal.”²³ As such, it is vital that one has a right understanding of God—such as described by the

²⁰ Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 3.

²¹ Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 14.

²² Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 14.

²³ Jennings, *The God-Shaped Brain*, 27.

Psalmist—who takes pleasure in his children as their King, granting salvation to those who are humble before him.

Neuroplasticity in the Historical Foundations: The Welsh Revival of 1904–5

The Welsh Revival noted for musical praise and worship exemplifies some core principles of both neurotheology and the neuroscience of music. Sparked by a love song, the fires of revival were responsible for a widespread communal impact that transformed societies and left its mark on Wales, as well as many other nations. Its quick spread was characterized by the powerful medium of music that allowed for expression of emotions and that resulted in an atmosphere shift; a trajectory worth exploring from a neuroscientific purview.

Researchers studying how humans respond to love have shown a correlation between looking at a loved-one's picture and activity in the dopaminergic region of the brain, where reward patterns are based.²⁴ It is no wonder people are continually looking for love! Leaf seems to agree, purporting that humanity itself is actually “wired for love.”²⁵ According to writer and philosopher James Smith, this desire is built into our nature as “agents of love,” with what and who we love, ultimately shaping who we are.²⁶

The Welsh Revival began with a fervent desire for God echoed in the love song that became its theme as people responded to his love on display through the worshipers. Rather than mere words and notes, participants would say that it was the very presence of

²⁴ Larry J. Young, “Love: Neuroscience Reveals All,” *Nature* 457, no. 7226 (January 2009): 148–148, Medline PubMed, EBSCOhost.

²⁵ Leaf, Amua-Quarshie, and Turner, *Think, Learn, Succeed*, 43–44.

²⁶ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, vol. 1, *Cultural Liturgies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 50–51.

God that drew them to repentance.²⁷ Simultaneously, as participants experience him, there would be a “corresponding neuron firing pattern that represents that experience.”²⁸ This is a response of love, rooted perhaps, on a cellular level as children in his *imago dei*. Consequently, societal change occurred as people were more conformed to that image of love, shaped by their desire. As God himself became the object of desire, people became oriented by “primal, ultimate love” directing their behavior and care for others.²⁹

Music frequently became the vehicle through which people felt or expressed love for God. The pleasure associated with music alone has been shown to have a powerful impact on rewiring faulty neuronal pathways, aiding in stroke recovery, pain management, and anxiety reduction. One research study involved subjects who “heard music so intensely pleasurable that it sent chills down their spines, [increasing] blood flow in a network of cognitive, emotive and autonomic areas.”³⁰ Music has also been shown to increase receptivity in the brain enhancing overall neuroplasticity.³¹ Specifically, research has suggested that either listening to or making music activates the premotor part of the brain responsible for planning.³² With this in mind, it makes sense that music helps to foster an environment that allows people to better receive the revival message and to subsequently act on it.

²⁷ Reinhardt, ““A Year of Rejoicing,”” 106–7.

²⁸ “Whenever we have a thought or a feeling, there is a corresponding firing pattern of these electrochemical charges along the neurons, or brain cells, as they communicate with each other and send signals to the rest of the body.” Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections Between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2010), 45, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁹ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 1:51.

³⁰ F. Clifford Rose, *Neurology of Music* (London, UK: Imperial College Press, 2010), EBSCOhost.

³¹ Ackerman, “What Is Neuroplasticity?”

³² Rose, *Neurology of Music*, 6.

As singing played a prominent role in the Welsh Revival with a “nation of singing birds,”³³ it is appropriate to ask how this might be viewed from a neuroscientific slant. Smith expounds that singing itself involves the entire person, engaging muscles throughout the body as “a performative affirmation of our embodiment, a marshaling of it for expression—whether beautiful songs of praise or mournful dirges of lament.”³⁴ Songs tend to get caught up in the imagination—one may catch themselves humming a tune unconsciously or have a song stuck in their head on a seemingly endless repeat. In fact, neural networks involved in the actual playing of or listening to music are the same as when it is merely imagined.³⁵ This has implications for how one may experience a resurgence of powerful emotions initially felt during worship when the musical imaginations replay in one’s mind. One who experiences comfort, a reassurance of God’s faithfulness, or a revelation of his love in worship can once again access those same feelings when that song is revisited, even if only within one’s imagination. In this way, powerful times of worship, such as realized in the Welsh Revival, could continue long past the physical gathering in accomplishing their work of transformation.

The shared experience of music has been shown to increase certain types of brain activity and promote synchronicity among its participants. Hippocampal formation, integral to the development of those emotions having to do with social attachments, is strengthened when singing or simply tapping along with another person.³⁶ In fact, one

³³ Shaw, *The Great Revival in Wales*, 33.

³⁴ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 1:169.

³⁵ Rose, *Neurology of Music*, 64.

³⁶ Stefan Koelsch, “Brain Correlates of Music-Evoked Emotions,” *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, no. 3 (2014): 170–174, Gale OneFile: Health and Medicine, EBSCOhost.

study discovered choir members' respiratory and heart rates increasingly in sync as they sang together—the synchronization was even more dramatic as members sang in unison with eyes closed as opposed to harmony and eyes open.³⁷ This underpinning of communal bonds is illuminating when considering the findings of neuroscientist, Emiliana Simon-Thomas, who regularly lectures on the correlation between health, happiness and the strength of one's community network.³⁸ Those who have solid social connections are generally happier and healthier than those lacking a strong social network.

Worshiping in communal atmospheres has an even more widespread impact beyond respiration and heart rate going all the way to the DNA level. Leaf discusses quantum physics' *law of entanglement*, which “states that relationship is the defining characteristic of everything in space and time. . . . Because of the pervasive nature of the entanglement of atomic particles . . . everyone is linked and we all affect each other.”³⁹ In essence, how we think and feel will impact those around us, having the power to impact our own DNA chain as well as those we relate with. One study tested the far reaches of the power of entanglement. It showed that as one area of the participant's brain lit up during meditation, the same area of the other participant's brain also lit up, even while they were situated in two separate and electronically shielded rooms.⁴⁰

The implications of this as it applies to the worship community are significant as one recognizes that their whole focus and attention on the goodness of God and his love

³⁷ Viktor Müller and Ulman Lindenberger, “Cardiac and Respiratory Patterns Synchronize between Persons during Choir Singing,” *PLoS ONE* 6, no. 9 (September 2011): 1–15, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

³⁸ Berkeley Executive Education, “Emiliana R. Simon-Thomas,” Haas School of Business, last modified March 22, 2017, <https://executive.berkeley.edu/emiliana-r-simon-thomas>.

³⁹ Leaf, *Switch on Your Brain*, 110.

⁴⁰ Leaf, *Switch on Your Brain*, 112.

for them may nudge someone else's brain to move in a similar direction. While no scientific explanation can quantify the work of the Holy Spirit in drawing people to God, this law of entanglement may also contribute to explaining the atmosphere conducive to the dramatic change people often undergo in revivals. Could participants' neural activity be so "supercharged" in fully focusing on God, so caught up in his presence that their own DNA molecules are not only modified but the strands of others are modified as well? Correspondingly, worshipers wholly focused on God and his goodness may truly be able to shift entire atmospheres making them more receptive to the work of the Holy Spirit. Viewing the revival through this scientific lens may help reveal the brain interaction of many Welsh people, who, standing or walking outside the building where fervent and passionate worship was underway, were drawn in and ultimately, fully surrendered to God.⁴¹

Neuroplasticity in the Theological Foundations: Theology of Intimate Worship

In the theological foundations we examined God's priority for intimate worship, how one is meant to realize that intimacy through trinitarian worship, and what kind of transformation one can expect when engaged in intimate worship. The neurotheological perspective will reveal the neuroscience behind God's design for intimacy and how music is meant to be a vehicle for the free expression of emotions. While neuroscience falls short of explaining the supernatural interaction of trinitarian worship, it does inform aspects of spirit and truth worship including its practice of meditation.

⁴¹ Shaw, *The Great Revival in Wales*, 162.

It is impossible to establish healthy intimacy without the ability to express honest emotions. In writing on the connection between neuroscience and spirituality, Curt Thompson explains that emotions originate from the oldest part of the brain—common with animals—rooted in the unconscious mind. These emotions which naturally occur within a person are known as primary emotion. Thompson expounds on God’s attention to our transformation: “He is ever about turning over every stone to reveal all that needs to be healed—especially those densely wired, ancient, implicit neural networks that represent emotion that is not integrated into the larger part of our mind’s landscape.”⁴² He continues that “life is fundamentally about emotion;” paying attention to one’s emotional state allows better integration of the various neural circuits. This is crucial in dealing with our own emotional processes, as well as impacting how we interact with others and God. Unless one is willing to attend to and address patterns of emotions, it is impossible to not recognize how their view of God may be distorted.⁴³

Listening to and engaging in music may help one tap into a variety of emotions as music inherently “contains certain universal acoustical signals triggering emotions of joy, sadness and other emotions.”⁴⁴ In fact, the connection between music and emotion is both strong and pervasive. Stefan Koelsch, a leading academic in the field of music and neuroscience, in his survey on the neuroscientific connection between the two, reveals that “activity in each and every so-called limbic and paralimbic brain structures can be

⁴² Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 106.

⁴³ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 121.

⁴⁴ Koelsch, “Brain Correlates of Music-Evoked Emotions,” 178.

modulated by listening to music, in both musically trained and untrained individuals.”⁴⁵

Not only has the connection been shown, but evidence has emerged confirming the theory that music can actually shift neural activity in these structures, yielding promise for future music therapy approaches in treating a variety of disorders and diseases.

By allowing music to reach the myriad of emotions that may be present during worship—being willing to be vulnerable in allowing those emotions to be present and come to the forefront—we can then submit them to God. As we become aware of what may have been hidden beneath the surface, we can learn healthy ways to process those emotions. Leaf explains that when neuropeptides and energy produced by emotions are permitted to flow unhindered, the entire body can function optimally. In contrast, when natural emotions are repressed, so are the neural chemical and quantum pathways, thus hindering the flow of those vital chemicals integral to both mind and body. After enough time, “you are essentially becoming expert at not feeling what you feel, which in turn creates tremendous conflict in your mind and damage in your brain. . . . creat[ing] neurochemical chaos in our brains.”⁴⁶ God has indeed wired us to relate to him and others with vulnerability and authenticity for the good of our entire selves.

In line with God’s priority of intimacy, he fosters connection with us as the Father, Son, and Spirit, by engaging us in trinitarian worship. As he invites people to participate in the communion of the Trinity, one can’t help but marvel at the wonder of each Person in an impossible quest to make sense of what is outside the bounds of our finite reality. Yet, these struggles should not be viewed negatively as they promote feelings of awe,

⁴⁵ Koelsch, “Brain Correlates of Music-Evoked Emotions,” 131.

⁴⁶ Leaf, Amua-Quarshie, and Turner, *Think, Learn, Succeed*, 66.

which turns out is a positive emotion.⁴⁷ A recent study showed that experiencing a sense of awe allowed one to feel a greater connection to their surrounding world. In so doing, “awe draws us out of our self-focus and engages us more with the external world.”⁴⁸

Trinitarian worship—which is the only acceptable worship to God—is made possible in the truth of the Son by the power of the Spirit. The importance of this balance of truth and spirit worship and its impact on our transformation is recognized in Timothy Jennings’ book, *The God-Shaped Brain*. He writes that “truth is comprehended via the left hemisphere of the brain, whereas our sense of unity, oneness and relational connectedness is experienced in the right side of our brains.”⁴⁹ Thus, if one is to meditate on truth—perhaps on some aspect of the nature of God—along with an awareness of their connection with God through the Spirit, both hemispheres in the brain are engaged allowing for “personal friendship with God, [and] actual transformation of character.”⁵⁰

Indeed, a study done by Newberg revealed that practicing meditation just twelve minutes a day results in “measurable growth” in the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC),⁵¹ “where we experience compassion, empathy and concern for others.”⁵² Although meditation in general shows positive effects on the brains of participants, those who contemplated a loving God showed the most dramatic improvement, including positive

⁴⁷ Andrew B. Newberg et al., *Principles of Neurotheology* (Farnham, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 227, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁴⁸ Kira M. Newman et al., “The Top 10 Insights from the ‘Science of a Meaningful Life’ in 2019,” *Greater Good*, https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the_top_10_insights_from_the_science_of_a_meaningful_life_in_2019.

⁴⁹ Jennings, *The God-Shaped Brain*, 226.

⁵⁰ Jennings, *The God-Shaped Brain*, 228.

⁵¹ Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 23–33.

⁵² Jennings, *The God-Shaped Brain*, 68.

effects on cognitive learning and memory.⁵³ Meditation in the study included not just focusing on a desired goal, such as a loving God, but also repetitive hand motions and vocalizations. In this way, the meditator “further enhance[s] the motor and coordination centers in your brain. . . . increasing efficiency throughout the brain, [so] more neural and metabolic energy is conserved.”⁵⁴

It would seem that God also had in mind our own benefit when he instructs his people to sing, meditate, and lift their hands toward him—“I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being. May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the Lord” (Ps. 104:33–34). “I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes” (Ps. 119:48). As such, meditation is rightly considered a part of worship as one focuses all attention on the Lord. Meditation guided by biblical scenes in which one experiences the comfort of the Lord practiced daily can alter neural pathways, allowing one to—perhaps for the first time—experience the Lord's comfort.⁵⁵ As we open up with the most intimate of feelings in relationship with him, he will rewire our brain to receive him as we are meant to.

Conclusion

Musical refrains are meant to become ingrained within us. Often designed to be catchy with memorable tunes and “hookable” lyrics, they can easily find their way into the recesses of our thinking and often, without conscious thought, we may catch them ruminating in our minds like a broken record. As this exploration has discussed, whatever

⁵³ Jennings, *The God-Shaped Brain*, 27.

⁵⁴ Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 33.

⁵⁵ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 142.

we meditate on—even without intention—influences our conscious thinking, emotional well-being, worldview, and, eventually, behavior. The conjunction of neurotheology and the neuroscience of music reveals that meditation through music has a unique ability to rearrange our neurons and pathways, presenting a golden opportunity to be further transformed through worship into the image of God.

Much discussion and debate continue in the Church on the subject of repetitive lyrics in worship music. The detractors speak to the shallow nature of such practice while its defenders argue the merits of being able to connect with God through repetition. Indeed, taking hold of the opportunity to teach and reinforce theology through the beauty of lyrics found in the hymn "And Can It Be?" is foundational to the Church and its doxology. Allowing the "word of Christ [to] dwell in you richly" (Col. 3:16) includes the frequent incorporation of such hymns.

Nonetheless, if his word is to "dwell" within us we must also foster the means for that to happen. Repetition allows us to hide his word in our hearts (Ps. 119:11) through meditation so that it may reside in the further reaches of our being. As one ruminates on his word, God often gives revelation in relating his character to us and our circumstances, allowing us to connect with him in ways not possible when moving quickly through dense lyrics. Through that meditative worship, neural pathways shift, reinforcing his truth and our relationship with that truth. With him. When that same repeated phrase returns to play in the recesses of our minds, that same emotion and message discovered in worship is not lost. Its accompanying force reminds the subconscious to trust in him as our spirit to Spirit connection is reinforced and one is more easily "filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:19).

The evangelical church has, largely, abandoned meditation, as it has more recently been touted as an Eastern tradition. Yet, the Bible contains at least twenty direct references to meditation acting as a catalyst for many Christian mystics, such as the Desert Mothers and Fathers and others, such as St. Ignatius, who incorporated visualization (biblical scenes of Jesus) and Teresa of Avila, who was influenced by Ignatius.⁵⁶ Neuroplasticity confirms what the Bible suggests: meditation is a powerful tool that leads to positive transformation. In keeping with this biblical truth, meditative worship will be incorporated into the project.

As previously discussed, the neuroscience of music reveals the music's effectiveness in promoting neural plasticity. Combining music with body movement allows the participant to access the Hebbian principle as additional networks fire and can experience enhanced reinforcement because of the accompanying synergy. Correspondingly, neural plasticity is increased promoting greater receptivity to what is being communicated—namely, in this context of worship, the presence of God and the message of worship, which is the nature of God. Thus, encouraging singing accompanied by movement is appropriate for the ministry project in promoting positive transformation.

Additionally, enriched environments have been proven to promote neuroplasticity in people of all ages. In the worship context, EE might allow participants to discover various multi-sensory methods of worshipping beyond singing that may be unfamiliar or even somewhat uncomfortable initially. As such, designing carefully nurtured EE in which worshipers are taught and then encouraged to freely explore previously uncharted means of connecting with God will be included in the project. Possibilities

⁵⁶ Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 47.

could include encouraging worshipers to experiment with various physical stances, lifting hands, dancing, art, writing, visualization, and simply being still before the Lord.

Neuroscientific research confirms the benefits of the mindsets and characteristics and posture of worship. Studies exploring gratitude reveal the benefits to the brain, mind and body of engaging in activities geared toward gratitude, as well as adopting its mindset. Worship, rooted in gratitude, has the additional characteristic of awe, which has been shown to allow one to transcend life's pervasive issues. Thus, neuroscience supports the benefits to the overall person of maintaining an attitude of worship.

Furthermore, neurotheology confirms that when worshipers engage in spirit and truth worship, both left and right hemispheres are activated, promoting both cognitive thought processes and emotional responses in relating to God. Neuroscientists have found that regularly maintaining a balanced and healthy communication between different parts of the brain leads to one's overall increased well-being.⁵⁷ This balance is integral as one engages in vulnerable and authentic worship accompanied by the hope of deepened intimacy with God and Spirit-led transformation. But unless one is willing to honestly tap into their emotions as they worship God, their brain may be in a relatively "hard-wired" state that rejects plasticity. As one represses emotions, certain pathways are reinforced, and ingrained patterns of thinking are further strengthened. Conversely, those who risk emotional vulnerability can also anticipate greater malleability as they await the Lord's touch in molding them to be conformed to his image. If we are to be transformed by the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—we must be willing to be clay in the Potter's hands.

⁵⁷ Andrew B. Newberg, "Research," *Andrew Newberg*, <http://www.andrewnewberg.com/research>.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

In the chapters leading up to this one, a case has been made utilizing biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary evidence for the importance of encountering God in worship and being transformed by his interactive presence. We, as his children, are meant to relate to God in intimacy and to be his representatives on earth to see his kingdom advanced. Accordingly, this project is based on the hypothesis that participants who are taught to engage in vulnerable and authentic musical worship with an expectation of encountering the Spirit of the Lord would relay one or more of the following: a heightened awareness of his presence with its accompanying characteristics, such as love, joy, peace, and faith; physical and/or emotional healing; an increased desire to engage in worship; and a greater sense of purpose and freedom in worship.

If participants were to be “taught to engage in vulnerable and authentic musical worship,” it was important to give them a foundational basis for why meeting with God without barriers is what we are meant for, which the theology of intimate worship establishes. This foundation would also be utilized to raise their expectation level for encountering the very presence of God in worship from that deeper place of intimacy. It was believed that encountering God in worship with fewer barriers would allow the Holy

Spirit to infiltrate places in each worshiper that may have been previously withheld allowing them to better experience the characteristics that accompany his presence. Psalm 149 was taught as a biblical blueprint for worship, revealing that worship is a natural by-product of our identity as children of God and meant to further his kingdom, which would increase attendees desire to engage in worship and their sense of purpose in worship. These desires would be further increased by learning how we are meant to be transformed in worship through the neurotheology of worship.

The expectation was that participants would grow in their biblical understanding of worship including God's desire to meet with his people in worship. As participants' anticipation of experiencing God's presence during worship increased, so would their desire to engage with him in worship for lengthened time periods. It was also expected that as worshipers learned to let go of barriers, they would encounter God in ways they had not previously experienced, leading to a heightened sense of intimacy with him. Subsequently, participants' hopes would be raised for what God wants to do through their worship, increasing their desire to continue to meet with him in worship, both individually and corporately.

Methodology

In determining what type of format would be the best fit for this project, a weekend workshop seemed to be the most suitable due to logistical considerations that included location availability, scheduling of volunteers, and continual restrictions with COVID-19. A format based on meeting once a week for six weeks would have been helpful to measure longer-term impact, to include additional time for teaching, and to

promote instilling a practice of worship for the participants. However, the project was dependent on worship participation and utilizing well-equipped worship leaders to help guide the musical worship. It was important to involve worship leaders who knew how to foster the presence of the Holy Spirit with musical excellence to minimize potential distractions as, otherwise, it would be left to me to lead the worship as well as the teaching. I determined it would be wiser to bring in others, so it was less dependent on me and consequently more repeatable. Finding a well-equipped full band to commit to six weeks in the middle of a pandemic was not realistic and Bay area restrictions would contribute additional challenges in scheduling that kind of public event. Subsequently, a weekend format was deemed the most appropriate for this project.

Participants

The workshop was held at Infusion Church but was advertised to three different congregations—my home church Willow Spring, Authentic Church in San Francisco, and Infusion Church in Dublin. Both Willow Spring and Infusion are non-denominational churches and Authentic is technically Baptist, although they have recently changed their name from Temple Baptist to Authentic in seeking to be relevant to a wider audience. Each congregation utilizes contemporary worship stylistically but exhibits differing levels of freedom in their musical worship—Infusion would be considered the most charismatic in their expressiveness during worship, Willow the most conservative, and Authentic somewhere between the two.

Participants were invited from the three separate congregations through service announcements, email, and social media that pointed to a website serving as a platform to

learn more about the event, including a link to register. The workshop was primarily advertised as an opportunity to grow in one's connection with God through encountering him in worship. Key topics highlighted were: learning to break through barriers keeping us from intimacy with God; understanding our identity as intercessors and our authority in spiritual warfare; and how we are meant to be transformed as we encounter the living God in worship.

Impact of COVID-19

Due to the realities of COVID-19 and their city's mandates, Authentic Church was restricted to gathering online only. While these restrictions slightly eased up immediately before the workshop allowing them to gather as a virtual streaming location at the physical church building on Saturday, Friday was completely online in individuals' homes. Leading up to the workshop, governmental shutdowns continually loomed causing uncertainty in the planning and requiring additional protections to be put in place for participants. All in-person participants signed a COVID-release form and had their temperature taken before coming in the building. Attendees could sing but were required to wear masks. Worship leaders and any speakers or teachers up front did not wear masks, although some band members chose to wear one during worship.

These restrictions also necessitated the development of an online component in which attendees would be able to engage purely online. Others who came in-person but may have had a conflict with one or more of the sessions were encouraged to attend the missed session(s) virtually. Having the online option also made participation available to some out-of-the-area registrants. Consequently, while the primary context for this DMin

project is the evangelical church in the Bay Area, some of the online data includes participants from outside of the geographical Bay. Stretching beyond the strict confines of the physical Bay Area is appropriate as attendance in the new world of online church is no longer restricted to a particular physical location. Many people now living outside the Bay consider one of these three churches their home church, either having recently moved away or having found them online during the pandemic. Survey questions addressed whether one participated online or in-person to understand how this factor may have impacted one's engagement. Gathering this data from the online participants is especially pertinent today as one considers the ramifications of encountering God in a virtual format and how it might differ from the in-person experience.

Tools for Data Collection

Research methodology was primarily qualitative, with a phenomenological strategy of inquiry, including pre and post-surveys, focus groups, and interviews/testimonials. Each of these tools would help to measure different aspects of the participants' experiences during the workshop and give a more holistic perspective. They would also be employed to triangulate the resulting information and determine whether the hypothesis was accurate.

Pre-surveys were used to establish a baseline for the participant's perceived level of intimacy with God experienced in worship, including their comfort level with various expressions of worship. After the workshop, post-surveys were conducted to gauge whether any change occurred in the participant's perception of their connection with God in worship. Identical questions were given in the pre- and post-surveys to easily measure

any meaningful changes in the participants' experience in worship throughout the workshop and to create a dependent means of comparison. Post-surveys also included an opportunity for respondents to mark whether their experience at the workshop was more, the same, or less than what they normally experience. Although the latter type of question alone could have been adequate in gauging differences, including the former contributed an additional layer of confidence that participants would think through and understand the question. This supplemental line of query would also help to clarify the attendee's perception of how they were impacted and give an alternative but complementary statistical approach for examining the data utilizing dependent and single-sample T tests.

Focus groups were scheduled at the Saturday lunch break following the third teaching and included two in-person groups at the main workshop location and another in-person group at the virtual streaming location. Participants were invited to join to process what they were learning and as a way of contributing to the study. Focus group participants were asked a pre-determined series of questions by the facilitator, inviting them to explore their learnings, impressions, and emotions experienced during worship. The focus groups served two purposes: gathering data in an interactive format and encouraging attendees to learn from other's experiences shared in the group. The focus groups were effective in learning attendees' reactions to that point in the workshop, but restrictive in that they did not include responses following the fourth teaching and last two worship sessions. Consequently, responses from the focus groups serve to confirm and elucidate the data gathered in the surveys applicable to those sections prior to lunch, along with the general feelings of the participants to that point.

Testimonials were gathered and interviews were given following the workshop to allow contributors to express how they may have been impacted through the teaching and/or worship in their own words. Participants were given the opportunity to give a written testimony by email or a verbal account through one-on-one interviews conducted after the workshop. The interview and testimonial format were intended to explore people's experiences in a less-restrictive format and to give voice to the data collected in the surveys.

Implementation

The Event

The project was conducted as an in-person two-day workshop, March 26–27, 2021, with an online component. The first session was held Friday night from 6:30–8:30 p.m. with three sessions the next day from 9:00–4:00 p.m. Each block of teaching was a little less than one hour leading into an extended time of worship—also just shy of an hour—incorporating the same theme. This format allowed the participants to immediately practice and relate to God from that fresh perspective. Ministry and prayer counselors were also available in the Friday night and Saturday morning sessions to allow for specific prayer support as participants were confronted with issues that perhaps needed to be released to God. A one-hour lunch break occurred at noon following the third teaching. Most stayed on campus as lunch was provided, with some participating in focus groups and others simply interacting with each other.

A total of fifty-five people both registered for and attended the event, either virtually or in-person. Eleven of the registrants were from Willow, fourteen from

Infusion, seven from Authentic, and twenty-three others who attended were not directly associated with either of the three churches—six of those from outside the Bay. Several volunteers also attended who were involved in running the event. They are not counted in the fifty-five total participants and were not asked to fill out the surveys.

In guiding participants through this workshop, I was the primary teacher and one of the worship leaders in two of the sessions. Other musicians and worship leaders were involved throughout the workshop and were given clear direction for the theme of each session. Opening worship sets comprised of one or two songs in the Friday evening and Saturday morning sessions. These were purposefully brief to allow for extended times of worship following the blocks of teaching. During the extended times of worship, a full contemporary band was utilized except for the third session, which was simple acoustic instrumentation to foster hearing God within a meditative atmosphere. Worship leaders and prayer counselors were also participants in the study as desired.

I was especially grateful for the involvement of my family in this project as several of them are worship leaders and musicians. This was a difficult, but necessary area for me to give away as it was integral to the project. I was especially careful about who would be in that position. I trusted my family to lead others with musical excellence and, more importantly, with a passion for God and for others to connect with him. My son, Colin True, flew up from Los Angeles to mix the sound, but at the last minute, our electric guitarist had a health issue and was unable to come. Colin rushed to Guitar Center and purchased an electric guitar to join the band and my husband, Eric True, who was scheduled to play keys jumped in to fill the sound role. That meant that I would be playing keys to fill that hole, which I was not initially planning to do. The exception was

Friday night when Eric played the first half of the set with Colin in the back and I relieved him the second half, leading the rest of the worship with the band from the keyboard. Saturday morning, my daughter and her husband, Chloe and Taylor Gall, arrived to be the main worship leaders for the day. They were unable to come Friday night due to a prior commitment at the mega-church where they serve as worship pastors. Having my family's support and involvement was invaluable to me and to the project overall. The rest of the band members are each excellent musicians from various churches I have served with in the past, all having an incredible heart to serve God and see him glorified in worship. It was a blessing and joy to work with each of them.

In addition to the teaching and worship, some testimonies from other participants were highlighted in the main session to encourage various ways of encountering God through worship. Participants were also encouraged to share with one another their own testimony of how they were encountering God throughout the workshop. Opportunities for this were specifically given during the lunch hour through focus groups or in individual interactions so that participants might learn from and encourage one another.

The teaching times were based on content from the project's four foundation papers with Psalm 149 woven throughout. Friday night established the theological basis of intimate worship, teaching participants how they have been designed to relate with God in intimacy and how that was his plan from the beginning of creation. They were invited to join in the dance of the Trinity, who enjoys and appreciates each expression of God. Participants were also encouraged to consider what barriers they may have in place preventing them from worshiping God intimately. Several large boxes of varying sizes were brought to the front so that participants might come forward and rip off a piece of

one as an activation to “let God out of the box” they may have unknowingly had him in. Prayer counselors were also available to pray with people as the Holy Spirit may have been highlighting various barriers they had in place.

As people came to the front, the worship team started softly playing and people began worshipping as well. The goal during this time of worship was to worship with songs that encouraged the breaking down of barriers preventing us from communing more intimately with God (“O Come to the Altar,” “Refiner”), that celebrated being in his presence (“We Open Our Hearts,” “In the River”), and that praised him in declaring our identity in Christ (“King of Kings”). The atmosphere started off rather stiff and formal but as the worship got underway and people began to get up out of their seats to come forward, participation was high. During that time, many came forward, tearing off pieces of cardboard, with some also praying with prayer counselors—participants seemed very engaged. At times, one could hear soft crying or even laughter in the room, which I later learned was this participant experiencing joy, having come at a time of severe heaviness in her life.

The next morning, the atmosphere in the room was noticeably more comfortable and worshipers, even in the opening songs, appeared more engaged than the previous evening. After the initial two songs of worship, Saturday morning’s teaching presented the biblical model for worship, including the who, what, when, where, and how, focusing primarily on Psalm 149. As exegeted earlier, this Psalm lays out the importance of vulnerability in worship, both communally and in private, and establishes our identity as worshipers belonging to God. God’s plan for healing and physical awareness of God in worship were also touched on briefly as time did not allow for greater depth on these last

two topics. A lengthy time of worship followed as people were encouraged to relate to him as the sovereign, yet personal and corporate Maker (“Goodness of God,” “Waymaker,” “You Hold It All Together”), and as his child ushering in his kingdom (“House of Miracles,” “It is So”). The atmosphere in the room revealed even more enthusiastic participation and signs of physical freedom in worship when compared to the previous night.

The third teaching block flowed directly from the end of the morning worship set and focused on how we are meant to be transformed in worship. The truth of N.T. Wright’s famous quote that “you become like what you worship” was highlighted through a backdrop of the neurotheology of worship.¹ The basics of how neuroscience has shown transformation in our brains when engaging in both music and worship was elucidated including the exponential implications of practicing both simultaneously. How freedom in worship further stimulates transformation was discussed, as was developing a daily practice of meditative worship. Psalm 149’s pivotal verse five was highlighted as exemplifying the foundation for meditative worship and its connection to transformation within ourselves and in culture. Implications for revival were taught in understanding how our thoughts influence those around us when worshiping in a communal environment. Hearing God in worship was also touched on, although time did not allow for an in-depth elaboration. At the end of the teaching, instructions were given for grabbing lunch, joining a focus group, and interacting with one another to share what God may be revealing. Participants were encouraged to return after lunch to explore

¹ N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*, 1st edition. (HarperOne, 2010), 148.

engaging with God in worship in imaginative and/or meditative ways they may not have previously.

After the one-hour lunch, a time of acoustic worship set the background for a creative time of engagement with God. The room was set up for exploration with stations offering drawing materials, scarves, and flags for expressions of movement and dancing, along with rugs for meditation. Additional space was also given in the room for greater movement. In the focus groups immediately prior to this, several had expressed an enthusiasm for encountering God through new ways of worshiping. As worship got underway, engagement increased, and many could be seen laying on rugs or chairs, drawing/writing, or dancing with flags throughout the room. According to the discussion in the focus groups, this was new for many of the participants. Jaime Lisle, one of the ministry partners, led an activation toward the end of this time of worship to help people relate one-on-one with Jesus. She utilized a text from Genesis 2 to lead worshipers through a guided meditation to help each one visualize themselves with Jesus as they interacted with him in the Garden. Songs in this worship set were geared toward deepening one's connection with the Lord as they enjoyed his presence ("Nothing Else," "Communion," "I Love You, Lord," "Gratitude," "My Worship").

The final teaching was directed toward God's holiness and worship as warfare when rightly rooted in a perspective of his holiness from a posture of humility. Participants were taught that as his emissaries, worshipers are his physical representatives on earth fueled by his Spirit within. The last half of Psalm 149 was examined through an eschatological framework, viewing worship of God as a part of restoring God's justice in bringing a right understanding of Yahweh. It is through the praise of children that his

throne is established, and the enemy is defeated (Ps. 8:2). This worship is meant to be intercessory in ushering in the kingdom of God in our lives and in the lives of others, exemplified in the Welsh Revival. Before the final worship set immediately following the last teaching, participants were encouraged to put this intercessory worship into practice as they exalted the holiness of the Lord while interceding for others. Correspondingly, the full band returned, leading worship songs that included themes of holiness (“Holy, Holy, Holy,” “Agnus Dei,” “Endless Alleluia”), warfare (“This is How I Fight My Battles,” “Raise a Hallelujah,” “Champion”), and overcoming (“What a Beautiful Name,” “See a Victory”), and the atmosphere was very passionate and celebratory. Participants displayed exuberance with a marked contrast of freedom and engagement when compared with the first session.

Coordinating between the in-person and livestream presented some logistical challenges, although the actual execution was fairly seamless. A technical point person at Infusion coordinated with Colleen Howell, the Worship Pastor at Authentic Church, and me several weeks ahead of the event to work out the logistics of broadcasting the live feed—Streamyard was chosen as the video platform as Authentic Church utilizes it weekly for their online services. Streamyard broadcasted the feed to both Facebook Live and YouTube allowing online participants to access the stream from either social platform in real time. It was extremely helpful that Colleen was already familiar with Streamyard, as she was able to virtually train and coordinate with the Infusion volunteers working the live event. That team consisted of a sound engineer who mixed the live band and separate video feed, a camera operator, computer tech, and an event coordinator overseeing the details of the workshop.

Each session was recorded so attendees would have later access in case they needed to miss any of the workshop. Colleen, who also played the role of livestream moderator, was given the songs, certain Bible verses, and other visual aids ahead of time to create graphic files for each session, which were then integrated into the broadcast. This broadcast was also projected onto the main screen at Infusion, which helped to bring some interaction between the live and virtual platforms. As the speaker, I could talk with the online audience and receive a written response as needed. Colleen could also include any helpful info spontaneously for the attendees. This interaction provided some connection between the two groups promoting a sense of cohesion. Some of those attending certain sessions both virtually and in person remarked that although the in-person was more engaging, God still met them through the virtual experience.

Data Collection

A link to the pre-survey was sent by email to all registrants the night before the workshop, and again just before the start of the workshop. The beginning of the survey included a consent form to give permission to participate in this doctoral research. Because the surveys were conducted in anonymity, the exact breakdown of surveys completed between the three churches was not recorded as the smaller numbers could put the participants at risk of being identified. Surveys were run through Qualtrics Survey Software, set up and organized by Dr. Ryan Howell, an Associate Professor of Psychology at San Francisco State University. Participants were invited by email to complete the post-survey immediately following the workshop and were reminded twice within the next week. Thirty-two participants completed the pre-survey and twenty-nine

completed the post-survey while a total of twenty-seven completed both. Of the twenty-seven that completed both, thirteen participants attended virtually and fourteen were in-person.

All three focus groups occurred during the lunch hour on Saturday—two at Infusion and one at Authentic Church, the streaming location. Attendees were invited to participate to contribute to the research and to learn from one another. Colleen Howell led a group of four, Jaime Lisle led a group of five and I led the other group of five. Focus group participants at Infusion self-selected into which group they would attend. Each group was recorded separately on an iPhone and transcribed by Rev.com into a Microsoft Word file.

Interviews of various participants were conducted after the workshop by Zoom, in-person and over the phone. Each session was recorded by Zoom, or on an iPhone and again, transcribed by Rev.com. Unsolicited testimonials were also gathered by email from those who chose to send one in.

Data from both the pre- and post-surveys was synthesized through SPSS (Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences), a point and click statistical software package including data and variable views utilized regularly by Dr. Howell when collecting and analyzing data. At the initial analysis, it was decided to primarily use the data presented from the twenty-seven participants that completed both surveys as that gave the most cohesive description of any potential impact the workshop may have had on participants. The data was then further analyzed by Dr. Howell and me over the next couple of months following the workshop. Information from the focus groups and

testimonials was coded to locate general themes to better understand the findings from this phenomenological study.

Summary of Learning

The pre-surveys helped to give a baseline for understanding the background and views of the participants, which seemed to be quite broad. Of the twenty-seven people who completed both surveys, a clear majority of respondents (20) self-identified as non-denominational, two as Baptist, one as Catholic, one as both Catholic and non-denominational, one as Pentecostal, one as Messianic, and one a mix of several.² Female attendees were more inclined to fill out the survey as they made up 77.8% of the total surveys completed and male attendees made up 22.2%. The age breakdown was relatively even with eleven respondents each at fifty years or younger and sixty-one and older, and the remaining five between fifty-one and sixty years of age. Respondents attending in-person (fourteen) were slightly more than those attending virtually (thirteen), in keeping with an even distribution.

² Participants were asked which denominational family they belong to or most closely identify with and could check more than one option. One person checked Ecumenical, Pentecostal, Evangelical, Presbyterian, and wrote in “raised Catholic.”

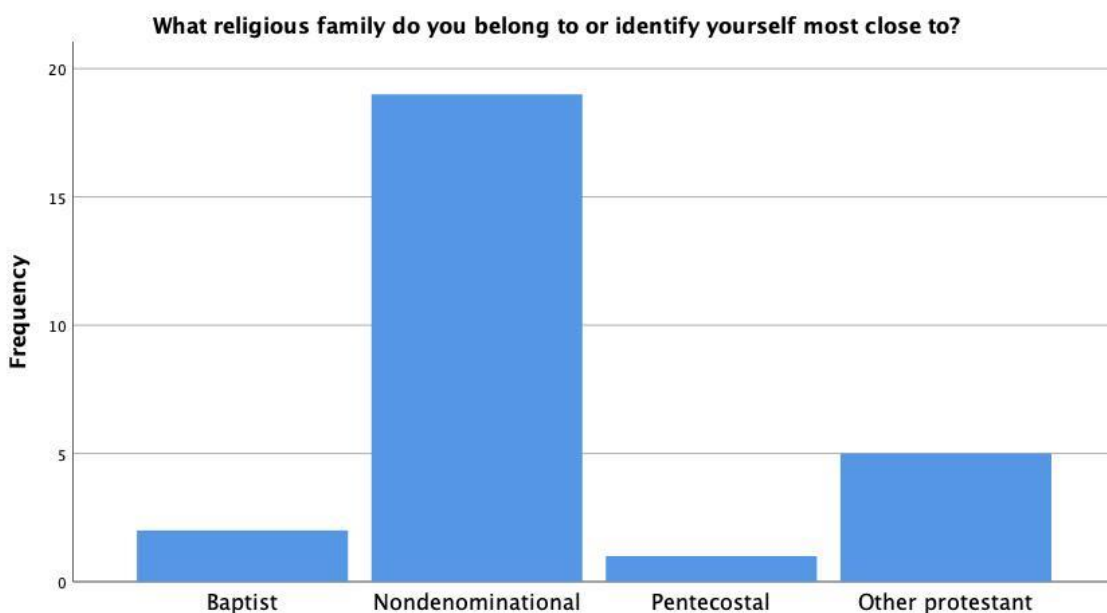


Figure 1. Participants by Denomination

All respondents considered themselves to be a Christian with a faith in Jesus. Not surprisingly, a strong majority of people agreed with all four tenets of evangelicalism, although not one hundred percent agreed with all four. The questions regarding the Bible and Jesus as being integral to their Christianity were unanimously affirmed. However, two respondents disagreed that true faith is evidenced by a changed life and one disagreed that it is important to their faith to share the message of the gospel. As these deviations could be attributed to variances or confusion in the individual's interpretation, their survey responses have been included.

Surveys were set up by category to help organize the information and more holistically examine the respondents' experience in key areas. Each area was set in the context of worship and included: perceived level of intimacy with and desire to pursue God; hearing God; physical awareness of God's presence; emotional responses; physical and emotional healing; sense of purpose; physical expressions in public and private.

These sets of questions were designed to align with the project thesis as understanding participants' changes in these areas would indicate the accuracy of the thesis.

A Heightened Awareness of His Presence

It is evident when considering the data that participants experienced a heightened awareness of his presence with its accompanying characteristics such as love, joy, peace, and faith during worship in the workshop. Respondents' experiences were evaluated in four different ways to determine if they had any statistically significant increases in at least one or more of the approaches utilized to measure change in this area. They were asked about their perceived level of intimacy with God, how they hear God, and the ways in which they might experience him, both physically and emotionally.

Overall, respondents reported experiencing a deeper intimacy with God in worship during the workshop than they normally experience. Of those surveyed, 66% reported an increase in their perceived level of intimacy with God in worship during the workshop. One gentleman during the focus group described his change in how he perceived God in worship and the resultant shift in his intimacy with him.

My entire life. I didn't know that face-to-face. . . . And that has just totally changed my view. That's been a complete shift of my position in worship. So, now it's different in a way. I experienced a face-to-face meeting, instead of worshiping without him.

Another woman relayed how her entire perspective of how God views her worship and how she relates to him has shifted since the workshop.

It's overwhelming that he does this with everyone. I think that's the concept that I had the most trouble comprehending—that it's an intimacy with every single one of us. I have now discovered that God really does enjoy my worship. I think I had thought of worshiping as the following analogy: Imagine Pharaoh sitting on his throne. He is surrounded by wealth, power, and adoration. He is sitting on a dais

watching a multitude of people worshipping him. No one in the crowd stands out to him because he is enjoying the massive worship. Now I know that the Lord does care about little ol' me in that crowd! "Step into the dance with the Trinity." You have taught me to not just pray to the Lord but meditate on HIM. What a wonderful way to encounter God. I am worshipping in a more intense way with song, movement, and joy!

Another respondent remarks on the barriers that came down during the workshop.

I've realized that in worship God just wants me to bring my true full self to Him, including the pain and the mess I'm currently walking through. I felt like barriers were coming down from between God and myself.

Another indicator of being more aware of his presence was how well the worshiper might recognize God speaking to them. I was interested to know how people hear God in worship and whether that would increase when they learned to pay attention to the various ways he speaks. Participants were asked to state how often they hear God normally in worship and whether that increased during worship in the workshop. As earlier stated, I did not have much time to teach on this, nevertheless, the data reveals that most respondents' perception of their ability to hear God increased. It is significant to note that participants had the choice of six methods in which they hear God and could report a change for each. It would be unreasonable to expect that each participant would have an increase in each of the six ways. What is perhaps more interesting to observe is the percentage of participants who experienced an increase in hearing God in at least one of the ways. Close to two-thirds of respondents (59%) reported an increase in hearing God in some way.

It is of particular interest that those with the lowest initial baseline scores regarding intimacy with God experienced the greatest growth in hearing God during worship at the workshop, a finding which is of statistical significance. For those who already reported higher initial levels of intimacy with God, their level of hearing God was

more likely to stay the same. This finding is counter to the Sensitivity Model reinforced in some of the following analyses, as those who came with the least amount of intimacy experienced the greatest growth in hearing God.³ When considering what may have caused this shift, the correlation could be made that perhaps those who feel less intimacy with God also struggle to hear his voice and would benefit from learning how to recognize his voice. Teaching people to recognize God's voice, particularly in worship, could be an important aspect to helping them grow in intimacy with the Lord.

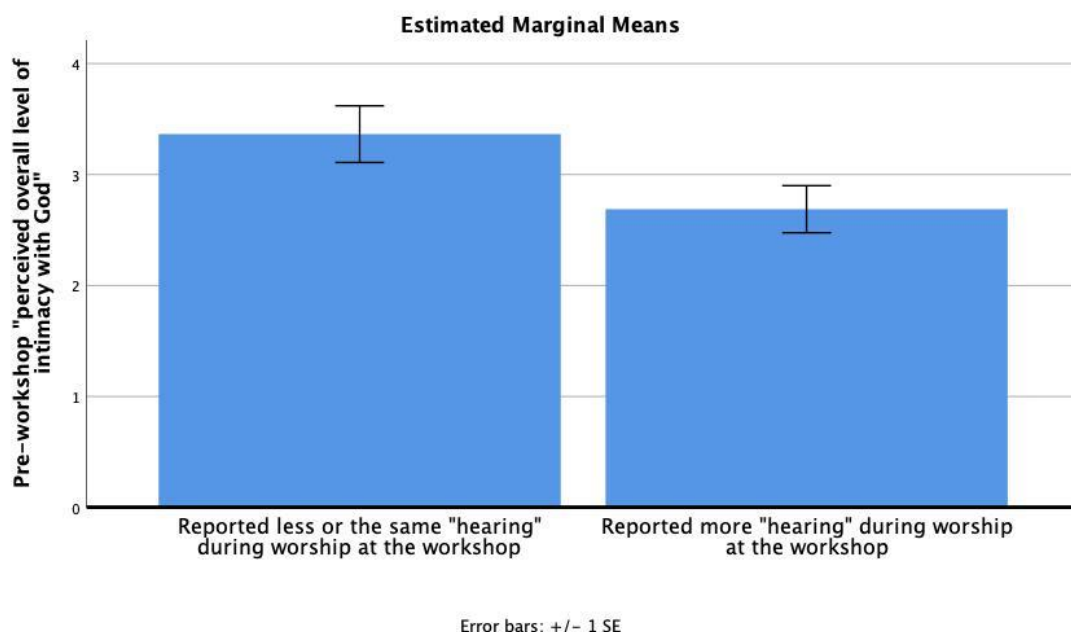


Figure 2. Level of Intimacy and Hearing God

The most common way attendees in the pre-survey reportedly heard God was through impressions in their spirit, also the method increasing the most during the workshop. Over half of all respondents reported an increase in hearing God in this manner, which was also the strongest finding of statistical significance. More than one-

³ According to Dr. Ryan Howell, the Sensitivity Model postulates that people who are already sensitive to experiencing something are better able to receive an increase in that thing compared to those deprived of it. The Deprivation Model states the opposite.

third reported an increase in hearing God through particular words of a song or Bible verse being highlighted, thoughts occurring out of the blue, and through visual mental images, also of statistical significance. About one-quarter of respondents experienced an increase in hearing God through a still small voice and the reoccurrence of a memory.

I heard God through...	Repondents selecting "More than Normal"
Impressions in my spirit	55.2%
A still small voice	27.6%
Thoughts occurring "out of the blue"	39.3%
Particular words of a song or Bible verse being highlighted	41.4%
Through visual mental images	34.5%
The reoccurrence of a memory	24.1%

Table 1. Percentage Increase in Hearing God

Two attendees told of the process they went through in hearing God speak.

I had a few images that came at different parts of the worship. I was thinking about why we worship and what she was saying. I felt like that story, the Bible story of Isaac and Jacob. . . . Of how this was to build an altar. And I felt like that was Old Testament worship. You're building these altars. . . . What are you going to ask me to sacrifice at the altar? What do I have to give up? And I felt like he said, "You know, Jesus. I gave you the sacrifice. You just have to build the altar and have a willingness of heart to connect and He's the sacrifice."

I felt moved to reach out to someone in a specific way. Only time will tell what impact that may have had. I also was given a word during the first session. I wish I could say it was a positive word, but it was a word of conviction. It wasn't even one Lori mentioned, so I know it was the Spirit. To work myself away, with the Lord's help, from what I have been convicted of will now be my goal.

A couple of others relayed the breakthrough in hearing God they had been waiting for during the workshop and in the days following.

While together in cooperate worship, I received breakthrough for an area I had been pursuing on my own in worship. Others' faith and hope helped me! I was able to hear God and respond to Him—creating more intimacy between us.

I feel like I am able to hear His voice somewhat again. That stirring in my soul and still small voice that has been quiet for so long is starting to show up in my days again.

I also wanted to examine how worshipers may experience a physical awareness of his presence as that is an alternative means of experiencing him. The data in the pre-survey reveals that registrants seldom experience a physical awareness of his presence in any of the six sub-sets. The post-surveys also revealed no statistical changes in this area during worship in the workshop although increases were reported. As the related teaching during the workshop amounted to less than two minutes due to time constraints, these findings are in keeping with my expectations. In hindsight, I would have liked to have carved out more time to teach on this to learn if raising one's expectations regarding experiencing physical sensations of his presence would correlate with their increase. Considering these lackluster findings, Dr. Howell pointed out that this data reveals thoughtful, honest responses that serve to eliminate questions of bias that might exist toward wanting to help the researcher by only giving positive responses. Accordingly, these relatively flat responses contribute to a greater level of confidence in the data where strong increases are shown.

Despite not finding any statistically significant changes in this area, several did note a physical awareness of his presence and how it made them feel close to God during the worship in the workshop.

An affirmation that the HOLY SPIRIT was speaking to me.

I was filled with overwhelming joy and gratitude that manifested in crying and goosebumps during worship. It was an amazing and beautiful experience!

It made me feel like God was right there with me, speaking to me!

My body shakes and I feel like the Holy Spirit is on me.

I didn't feel any of the physical items described above. HOWEVER, I felt a sense of inner joy and a "lightness" in spirit.

The only response I sometimes have is the tearfulness in experiencing G-d's love.

Overall, it was exciting to experience joy, peace, and a closeness to God during the worship

I used to cry during worship every Sunday while leading when I first started on the worship team (around 3 years ago). For some reason the tears stopped over the past year and a half. It felt refreshing to cry again during this workshop. I didn't want to leave from that state.

One man tells of how God encountered him in the first session's worship he was watching online when the participants were encouraged to ask God what barriers they might have up.

She was talking about things in our hearts that were holding us back. . . . and then the song, "Refiner's Fire" came on. So, before that I was closing my eyes and I was like, okay, "Search me, Lord." And then I started to just feel almost like a desperateness and then the song came on and that intensified it. And then it just felt like. . . so I was crying, and in my room, I just couldn't stop. And then I did stop. I took a breath and then I just felt this light or just something just helped me feel okay. It just felt like . . . Okay, I'm going to describe it—don't think I'm crazy. It felt like Jesus was there with me and holding my heart. But I felt like my heart was big and He was just holding it. And I was like—ahhhh—that's so cool. And I just sat back, and I was like, this feels good. I want to be in this the whole time. And it just felt like stuff within me was just burning up.

Another participant and her friend share what they were experiencing when asked if they felt any physical awareness of his presence and how that correlated with the emotions filling them.

We were moved to tears quite a few times. . . . That came out of nowhere, almost. The intensity of the emotion. I was . . . give me another tissue, please. And, at the same time, I found myself getting caught up in the ego of like, "Oh my mascara," you know what I mean? So that's good to be aware of.

But yeah, I would say joy, too. I was feeling incredible joy last night and today. The crying is just so grateful, the gratitude.

In this area, as well as with the emotional responses, respondents whose scores trended higher in the pre-survey were more likely to experience increases during the workshop when compared to those whose means were lower. In keeping with this Sensitivity Model, it would be more accessible for those who already are comfortable with some level of physical expression to experience a greater degree of it. One respondent who was not familiar with physically experiencing God commented.

Sometimes the differences are a little uncomfortable even though I was warned that it might be. I am needing a little improvement of the physical experiences.

With this in mind, it would be fascinating to do further research on what causes some people to have more physical sensitivity than others to the presence of God. If worshipers are taught that physical sensitivity is possible and many find it to be an integral part of experiencing God, will their desire for it increase? If worshipers who would like to increase their physical awareness of his presence are taught to recognize and remove barriers that may exist, will that correlate with an increased measure of physical sensitivity? These questions will be left for future research to endeavor, but they would be appropriate for a focused or longer-term project of this nature.

It seems that the physical and emotional reactions are closely related as indicated by the testimonies. This evaluation of the respondents' emotions felt in worship correlating with those accompanying his presence, such as love, joy, peace, and faith, completes the final piece of the picture in determining whether participants experienced a heightened awareness of his presence. Not surprisingly, the baseline numbers are much more robust than those regarding physical sensations. In addition, each emotion investigated reported an increase in the degree to which participants felt that emotion

during worship in the workshop. Almost two-thirds of participants reported increased feelings of love, about half of respondents experienced increased feelings of hope, faith, and peace, and over one-third of respondents conveyed increased feelings of joy when compared to what they normally experience in worship. Each of these increases are considered statistically significant.

I experienced feelings of...	Repondents selecting "More than Normal"
Love	63%
Joy	37%
Peace	48%
Faith	48%
Hope	52%

Table 2. Percentage with Increased Feelings

Physical and Emotional Healing

Determining whether participants experienced long-term emotional or physical healing was outside the scope of this project, and admittedly, this segment is less obvious in gauging its success. The qualitative data helped to tell the story of how participants were impacted alongside the various emotions participants experienced, such as those characteristics of God discussed above. When participants were asked to describe what kind of emotions they felt, a few shared how worshipping God changed the negative outlook they brought to the workshop into a positive one.

I'll be honest that this morning when I was driving over, it was like, "Man, I am not in a good space. But I'm going to a worship thing. . . . Then the joy comes. It's like, wait a minute. I don't really have a good basis for this, but the rest of me just loves being in his presence. There's a part that says, "No, we want to be upset about this." It's like, eh, you're being overruled. I came in a messy head space. And got that switched over pretty quick.

Hopefulness and optimism that you float on a little bit, because it's so easy to just focus on stuff that isn't going well in your life and just get caught up in the smallest things. There are moments and it's like, am I looking forward to anything? So, it just turns it all around. Just makes you more positive.

Feels like it's the letting go of whatever, all the junk, all the things that we're focused on at times.

It's like just getting into the stream of his love. And it's not so much, maybe that even love is emanating from my heart, but it's being able to receive it, just be enveloped in his love and in that atmosphere of love and peace . . . like washing off all the garbage and just being able to then move out in that place of peace and being able to take that with you.

Overall, it was exciting to experience joy, peace, and a closeness to God during the worship.

The impact on participants' emotions could also be characterized as potentially impacting any emotional healing that may be needed. Although no long-term impact was studied regarding specific hurts and attendees being healed from those hurts, their refreshed positive outlook would almost certainly influence their gamut of emotions experienced in the short-term. If worshipers would develop a daily practice of worship, dealing with various pre-existing emotional hurts could become more manageable instead of being in the forefront of one's daily living. With their new openness and alignment with God's characteristic emotions, one could submit their own emotional hurts perhaps more easily before the Lord, expectantly waiting on him in that posture of intimate worship to heal those once and for all.

Participants revealed strong pre-existing beliefs about God being their healer, both emotionally and physically. With the average mean approaching the highest metric in the pre-survey, "strongly agree," one would naturally not anticipate much of an increase due to a ceiling effect. Nevertheless, 30-44% of respondents reported an increase

in the strength of these beliefs following the workshop. Their confidence in God as their healer, his desire to heal them and their expectation that he would do so, specifically in worship, intensified. A few people's comments related to the strengthening of that belief.

I realized that I currently have God in a box and don't fully believe that He will heal me. I learned that I need to practice worship and meditation, and that the act of worship has a huge impact on your overall well-being.

I have a better understanding of how intimacy with God affects our physical and mental health.

I learned so much . . . the physical changes that can happen in our bodies when we worship . . . the healing that can happen through believing worship.

Additionally, one person reported experiencing physical healing and nine reportedly experienced emotional healing "more than normal" during the workshop. It is noteworthy that we never prayed specifically for healing, either emotional or physical, although I did include some teaching on God's desire to heal us in worship. One person also gave his testimony of a previous healing he had experienced spontaneously while worshipping. It is likely that any healing participants received at the workshop would have been of a spontaneous nature during the worship as there was no time set aside for healing prayer.

One respondent describes their new posture of emotional openness before the Lord.

I've learned to be more open emotionally with the Lord. I feel like because of my relationship with my Father it's not always the easiest thing to be emotionally open with Father God, but this workshop brought me into a place of willingness, trust and surrender to the Lord in my emotions.

An Increased Desire to Engage in Worship

In contrast to physical and emotional healing, it was simple to gauge the success of this area as a strong majority of people reported an increased desire to engage in worship following the workshop. Participants were asked about their baseline and corresponding post-workshop desire to worship in both a communal and private setting. The analysis revealed that over 81% of respondents' anticipation of pursuing God in worship in private increased and over 85% of respondents agreed that their desire to pursue God in worship in private increased. These statistically significant increases reveal that participants' overall desire to meet with God in worship and their anticipation of doing so in the future became clearly stronger following the workshop. A smaller number of respondents, 69%, also conveyed a stronger desire to meet with God in communal worship. Some attendees expanded on their increased desire to spend time in worship.

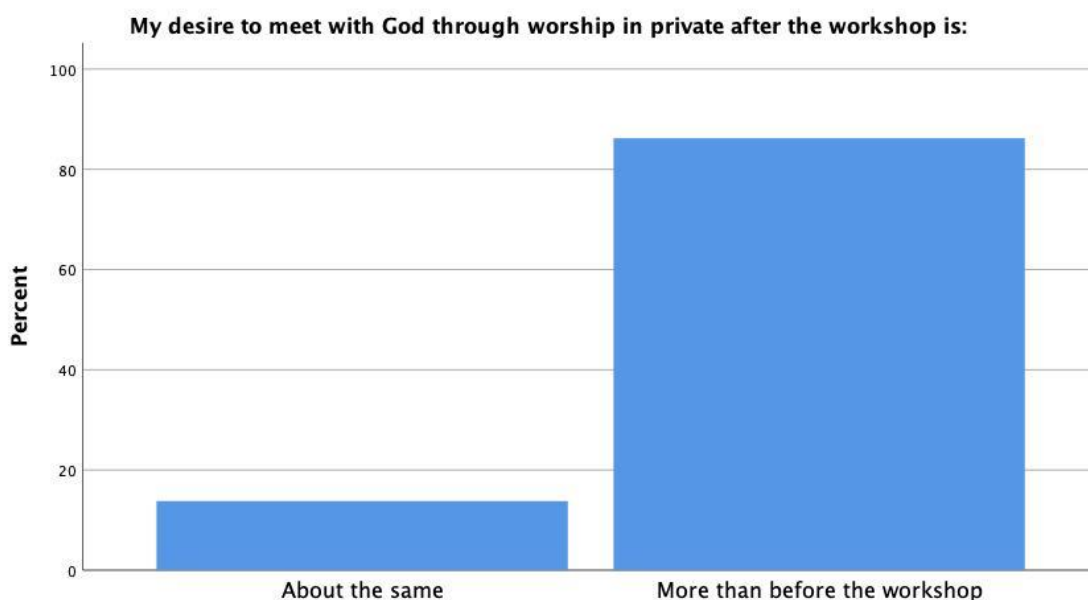


Figure 3. Percentage Change Desire to Meet with God

I feel closer to God and [am] more aware of purpose through worship with music and plan to be more intentional about making time for that every day.

[I have] a desire to make worship a more vibrant part of my day.

[I am] more motivated to pursue God in worship.

I see worship as a way to obtain greater intimacy with God. Like prayer and meditation, I now understand the value of using worship to communicate and draw closer to God.

I understand much more that worship needs to be part of my daily practice. That gratitude will both be good for my brain and body and also for me spiritually.

Carving out more time to worship God begins with desire. But if it ends there, nothing is gained. My hope was not simply to increase attendee's desire to worship but to also give them tools and additional motivation that would spur them to action. Accordingly, participants' anticipation of pursuing God in worship in private was also measured. Several participants discussed their plans to incorporate worship into their daily lives.

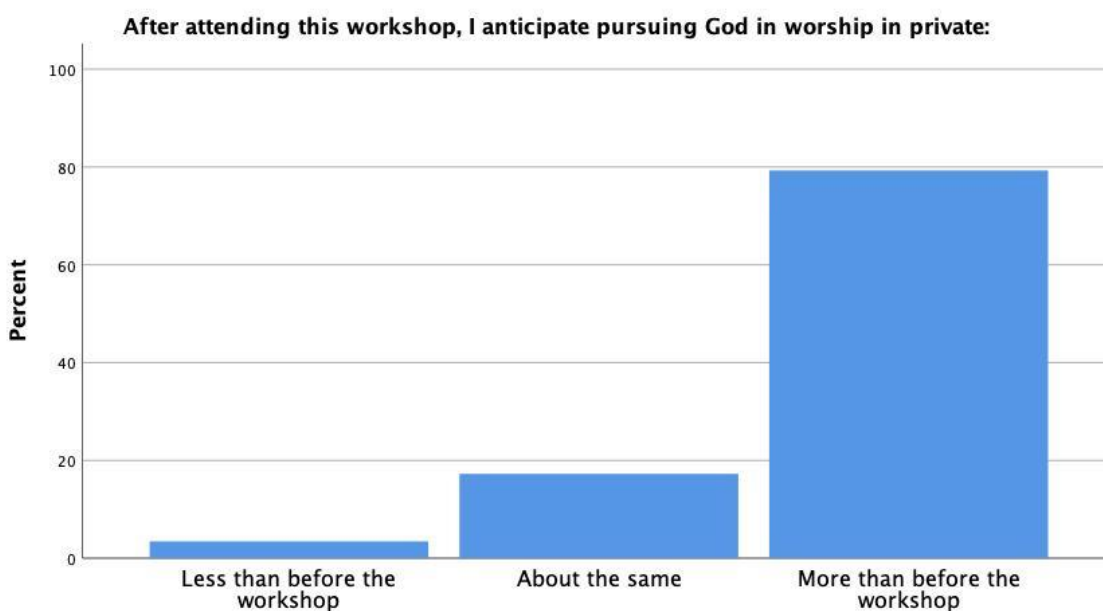


Figure 4. Percentage Change Anticipation of Pursuing God

I'm going to intentionally put music on—maybe playing the piano is part of it too—but putting music on because I don't play music as much, not nearly as much. And beautiful spiritual worship music. . . .

I have increased listening and participating in worship during my day.

I think trying to do different things. Really pull out my flute more. I've got a hymn book. Just try playing some of the hymns and maybe break out the worship-dance to it again.

I think there's something about that 12 minutes. . . . And so that was good when I was like, "I can find you 15 minutes a day and just really sit." So, I set an alarm on my phone for 9:30 every day. Fifteen minutes.

How do you spend your time to find your priorities? You may say X and Y but it's really what you're doing, how you're spending your time throughout the day that matters. So, it made me think exactly about that. I can find 12 minutes.

A Greater Sense of Purpose and Freedom in Worship

I believed that if participants could feel a deeper sense of purpose in their worship that it could translate to more engagement and frequency of worship. Similar to increasing worshipers' desire to meet with God, participants clearly felt an increased sense of purpose in worship as a result of the workshop. I was somewhat surprised to learn that their initial beliefs in this area were already strong as they approached the top of the scale. It was encouraging to see that once again, despite the ceiling effect, 70–75% of respondents' beliefs increased in each of these five areas. Attendees discussed their increased sense of purpose in worship.

There are so many emotional and mental battles myself and family deal with that could be eradicated through intentional worship—how long have we missed out on that opportunity??

As I finished the conference another thought out of the blue hit that just has me angry at the Enemy and wanting to fight back as a family unit. I definitely feel a stirring in my soul to rise up and start battling the Enemy again through worship and prayer as I have passionately done in the past.

I think I understand God's part of building the relationship which was not before. I understood I always felt better having worshiped in church with music and singing. I did not understand how it would help build a relationship that God would have with me.

Gauging Respondents' Sense of Purpose in Worship	Pre-survey results (scale of 1-5)	Repondents selecting "More than Normal"
My worship of God is important to establishing His kingdom on earth.	4.46	70%
I believe that my worship is an effective spiritual weapon.	4.81	70%
Worship is a necessary element to my spiritual walk with God.	4.77	70%
I feel a sense of purpose when I worship.	4.27	74%
I regularly engage in worship as a form of intercession for myself and/or others.	3.96	74%

Table 3. Percentage Increase in Sense of Purpose

As mentioned earlier, I couldn't help but notice the freedom in the room toward the latter half of the workshop as people moved more freely about the room, raising hands, moving with scarves or flags, dancing, or even laying on a rug in worship. This was in great contrast with the stilted atmosphere in the room the first night. While there were some charismatic participants, they were rather subdued when compared to some services I have attended at Infusion. I was also familiar with the participants from my home church, Willow, who were not typically expressive in services. There were only a very few that would be inclined to lift their hands to the Lord during a Sunday service.

This shifted atmosphere I observed was indicative of a significant increase in participants' sense of overall freedom in worship. The quantitative and qualitative data

also confirms that attendees did indeed experience a new level of freedom. This is especially true when considering how comfortable worshipers are engaging in expressive worship when others are also comfortable with it.

There were little statistically significant changes in participants' comfortability with expressions of worship in private or in community. The exceptions to this were with expressions of dancing/free movement and expressing emotion in a communal setting, which each saw a mean increase of .50 and .31 respectively. Not surprisingly, all three of the mean expressions in private were much higher than those in community. The pre-survey side-by-side graphics provide a good illustration of how much more comfortable worshipers are using free expression in private than in community.

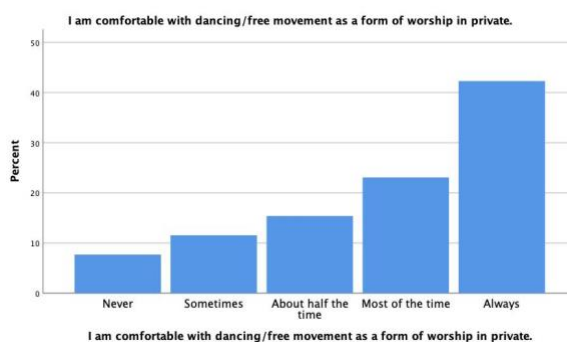


Figure 5. Dancing in Private

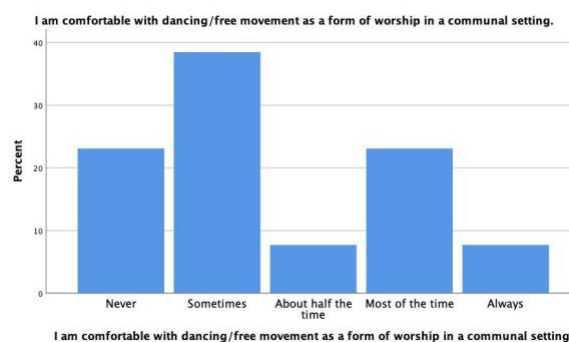


Figure 6. Dancing in Community

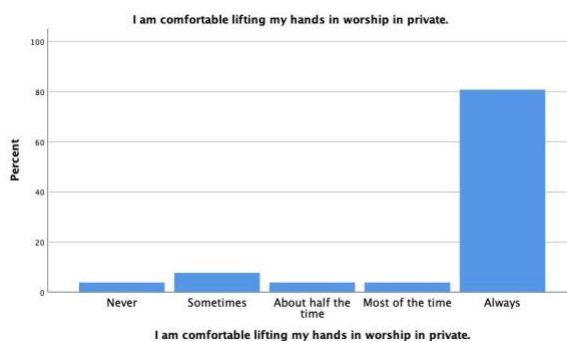


Figure 7. Lifting Hands in Private

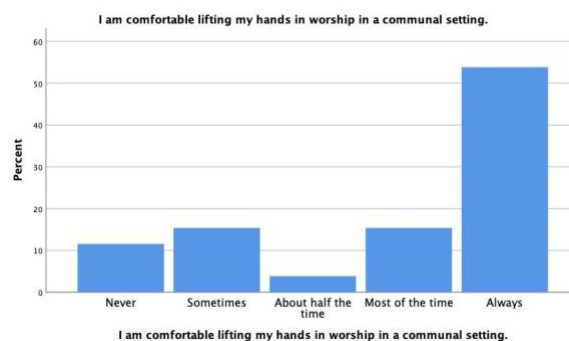


Figure 8. Lifting Hands in Community

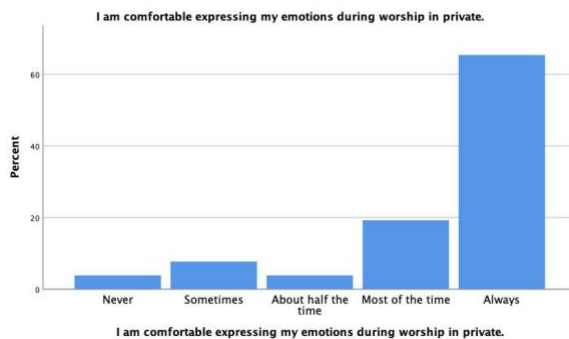


Figure 9. Emotions in Private

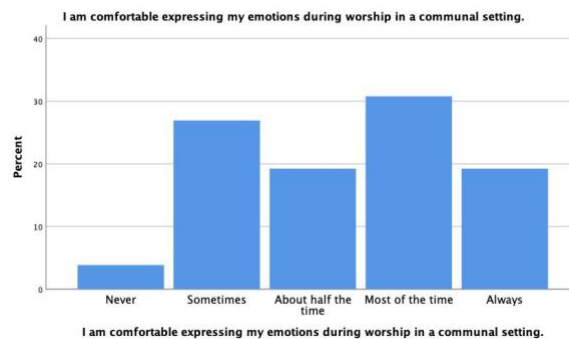
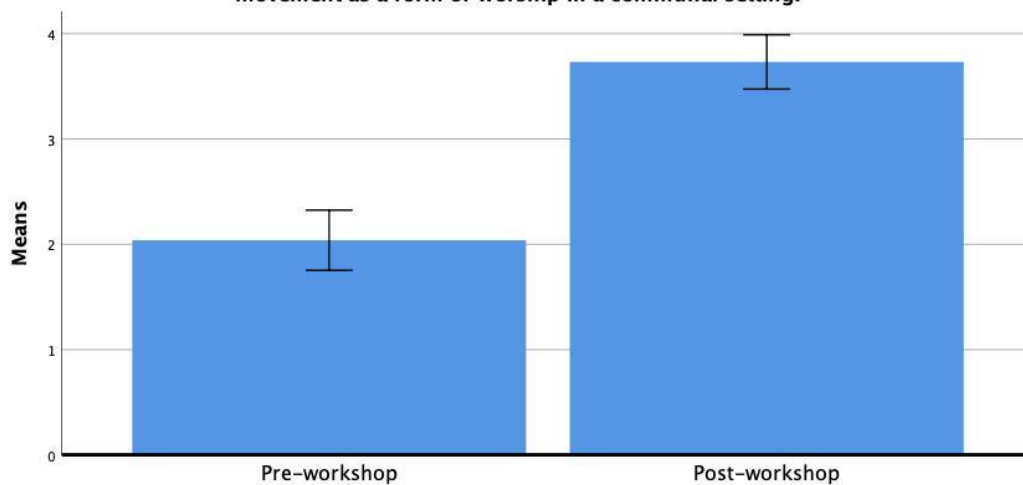


Figure 10. Emotions in Community

Worshippers may be hesitant to display emotional and physical expressions during worship in community, but when taught the biblical basis, encouraged to explore those emotions, and provided a safe place to do so, they seem to become much more comfortable with those expressions. This evidence was apparent when considering the change before and after the workshop, as attendees noted relatively massive changes when asked how comfortable they were expressing worship when others were also. Before the workshop, participants' means were trending average for each area. After the workshop, they were trending toward the top of the scale in each. It seems that participants who were able to express themselves during the workshop in ways they may never have previously become comfortable doing so in an environment that fostered that freedom. These changes are especially convincing when considering the relatively small changes in respondents' feelings towards expressing emotions generally in worship as evidenced in table four further below.

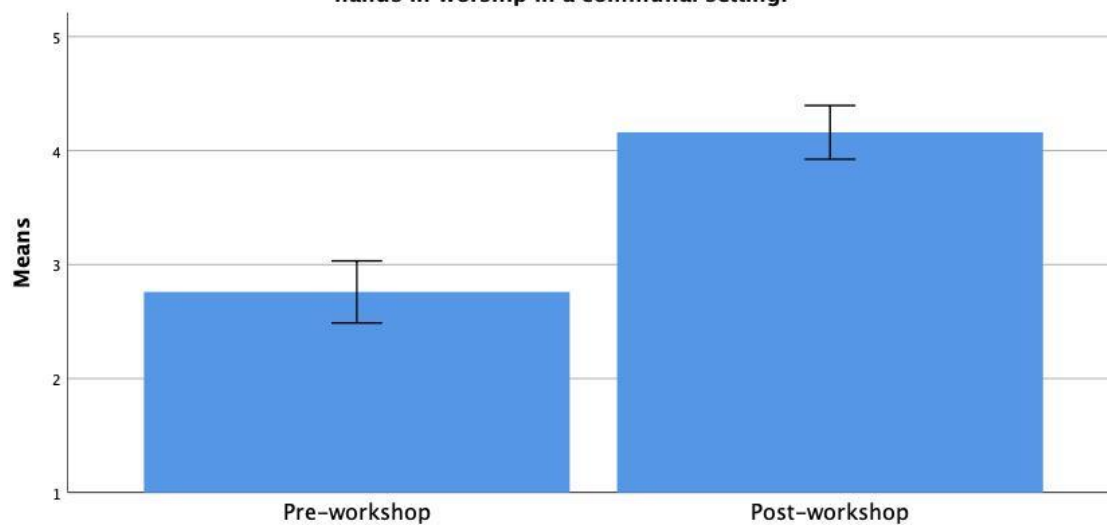
If someone else is comfortable with dancing/free movement, then I am comfortable with dancing/free movement as a form of worship in a communal setting.



Error bars: ± 1 SE

Figure 11. Means Increase Dancing If Someone Else Is

If someone else is comfortable lifting their hands during worship, then I am comfortable lifting my hands in worship in a communal setting.



Error bars: ± 1 SE

Figure 12. Means Increase Lifting Hands If Someone Else Is

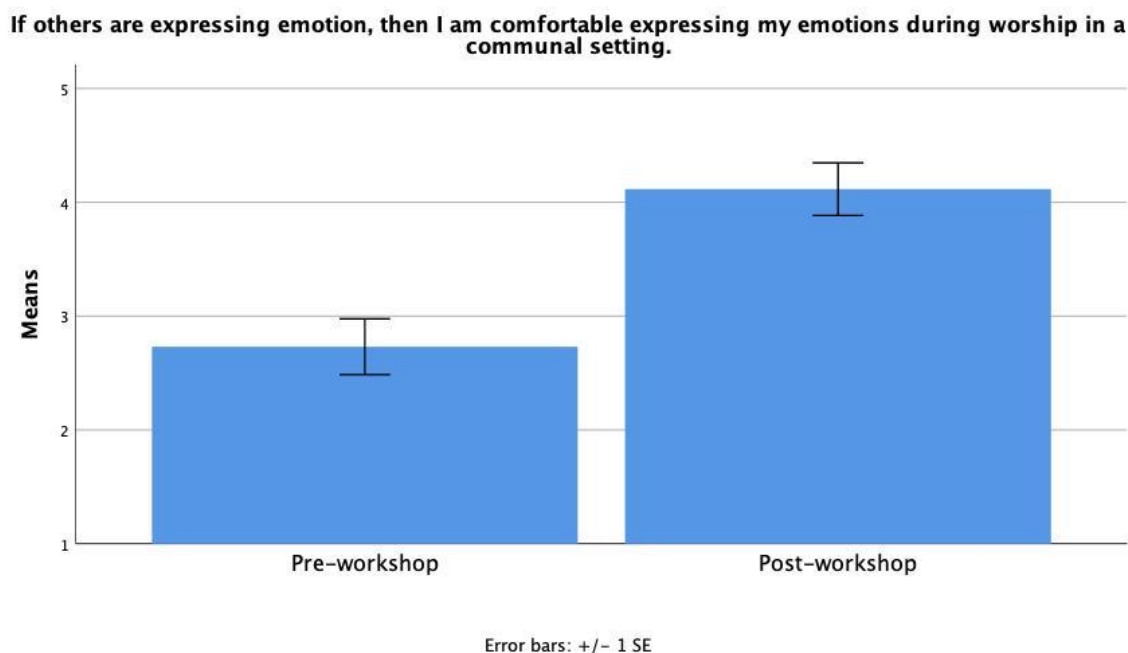


Figure 13. Means Increase Expressing Emotion If Someone Else Is

Expressions of worship	Mean Results; Pre-Survey (scale of 1-5)	Mean Results; Post-Survey (scale of 1-5)	Variance
I am comfortable with dancing/free movement in a communal setting	1.54	2.04	32%
I am comfortable with dancing/freemovement in private	2.81	2.96	5%
I am comfortable with lifting my hands in a communal setting	2.85	2.62	-8%
I am comfortable lifting my hands in private	3.5	3.46	-1%
I am comfortable expressing my emotions in a communal setting	2.35	2.65	13%
I am comfortable expressing my emotions in private	3.35	3.46	3%
If someone else is comfortable with dancing/free movement...	2.04	3.73	83%
If someone else is comfortable lifting their hands then...	2.76	4.16	51%
If someone else is comfortable expressing emotion, then...	2.73	4.12	51%

Table 4. Comfort with Expressions of Worship Pre and Post Event

This implies that congregations that seem uncomfortable with free expressions of worship do not necessarily need to remain so. If faith communities are taught the reasons

behind allowing freedom, while promoting respect and honor for one another in a congregational setting, they can encourage more authenticity to give to and receive from the Spirit of the Lord, as well as with each other. Encouraging worshipers to see one another with eyes of grace rather than judgment within the walls of the church could help in fostering a greater level of grace outside the confines of the building for those in and outside of the Body.

Some participants shared what it meant to them to experience such freedom.

I definitely felt the Holy Spirit's presence during the workshop. . . . It was so wonderful and freeing to do the flagging during the creative session . . . I felt very fluid and peaceful and relaxed and comfortable flagging during the session, and in the past that may have not been true, I am not usually so comfortable being that expressive in worship! It felt like such a safe space to try the flagging . . . I really love how much more comfortable I am now expressing my worship (raising hands, etc.) in church and not worrying about what others think, but just worshiping in the Spirit!

I experienced a fresh new freedom, that was a direct result of the workshop! All I want is to use my life in such a way that is pleasing to him, and to advance his kingdom!

[I] will practice intimacy with God more freely.

One worship leader spoke of how her newfound sense of freedom has impacted her private and public worship.

I set up the piano and just started playing some chords and just kind of singing. I don't remember what. . . . I recorded it cause I was like, "Oh, this might be a song." Anyway, just started singing and I really just . . . felt a new sense of freedom. . . . I think I have been able to hear him better and be in that, in more of a response mode as opposed to a task-oriented mode. I think I'm starting to understand the partnership aspect of . . . God delighting in us responding to him. . . . I'm asking God on Sundays, "Where are we going today?" Like expectation and excitement. Because the Bible says that we can't comprehend what God's thoughts are, what his plans are. And if we've got them in that box, we sort of carry him along with us, as opposed to letting him loose and being like, take me where you want to take.

Overall Feedback

The written comments and responses from the participants and volunteers were overwhelmingly enthusiastic, expressing the value they gleaned from the event along with their appreciation.

It was an amazing workshop and I am so grateful I was able to participate! It was a very inspiring day—excited for revival in the land, and for revival in my personal relationship with God!

[You] have no idea just how timely and how needed this was for me in what I'm currently walking through.

I learned more than I could ever have imagined. Hallelujah! Thank you.

I truly enjoyed the conference and only wish I could have been there in person to fully dive into it. A large part I missed out on was engaging in creative worship after the lunch break and would have loved the quiet opportunity, distraction free, to press into that.

This was a great workshop. Thanks for helping me get back to having more intimacy with God.

I really loved the worship encounter. Thank you.

This experience was so positive in so many ways. . . . I am so thankful that I made the time to attend because the whole thing was such a blessing. I am so thankful God meets us where we are.

This workshop has increased my awareness of the value of worship in my life.

I loved the stories. I loved the music. I loved the teaching and reminder our worship is to the "Audience of One" and He is the One we worship.

There were many things that had an impact on me. The words that were said shifted me. I cannot tell you what the words were, but I do know that I am different and can go deeper.

Some of the comments related to having my family involved. People seemed genuinely blessed to see us together leading worship and flowing with the Holy Spirit

through the music. I believe it was a reinforcement to the participants of God's gift of family and serving him together on display.

[Lori's] beautiful family is also so gifted, and it was extra special to see them all leading worship together!

Lori did amazing and her family as well were incredible during this workshop.

The beautiful gifting of the True family was evident throughout the workshop. You all model love for G-d and for each other, and you use your talents for His glory.

A few worship pastors in attendance relayed the importance of their entire congregation learning the truths taught at the event.

As a worship pastor, I feel I am constantly managing the tension of operating in the prophetic/spiritual realm and creating experiences that are engaging and inviting for new/non-believers to participate in and go deeper into things of God. I was so encouraged by Lori and this workshop because it gave me clear language and theology for things I may have known in my spirit, but was unable to articulate or teach to my teams and congregation. The material Encounter covers is highly practical for worship leaders and worshipers, and very timely for a world that is both in need of miraculous and powerful encounters with God through worship and airtight truth and theology. 10/10 would recommend for anyone, and I can't wait to figure out how to get my teams to participate.

Oh my gosh, we really need this. . . . I would really love for our whole team and even other people who are interested in worship, but maybe aren't on the worship team per se, to hear this and to experience it.

As a worship pastor, I specifically appreciated the Encounter experience because it provided such amazing Biblical evidence for the power and importance of worship through music. Lori taught "Encounter" in such a way that anyone from any church background could feel comfortable in the environment, yet walk away having learned so much, gone outside of their comfort zone, and gained a new appreciation for the power of worship in their lives. I'm so grateful I was able to experience it and will take so much of what I learned back to my worship team and congregation!

In conversations with others at the event, the comment: "I've never heard this before!" was said by a few who have been Christians for most of their lives. While I am sad this is a real problem in the Church, I am SO grateful for Lori's teaching - bringing the truth to the Church!

While those watching online missed out on the opportunity to experience freedom within a communal setting, virtual attendees had the freedom to continue their daily activities, which can be a distraction. God has a way of moving despite, or through those distractions. One online participant told of how she had the workshop on all day while she was doing what needed to be done around the house with her two daughters following her continually. She reported that they then “accepted Christ in their hearts.” It is incredibly gratifying to know that the Holy Spirit—the One who brings freedom—worked both within and outside the parameters of this project.

Conclusion

Overall, the workshop event appeared to be a great success in helping the participants grow in their intimacy with God and increase their desire to relate with him and accomplish his purposes in worship. Most respondents relayed experiencing greater measures of his presence as they heard him more clearly, and felt stronger emotions of love, joy, peace, hope, and faith than they would normally in worship. Physical and emotional healing was experienced by participants, although it was not necessarily widespread. It was particularly encouraging to realize that almost all those in attendance reported an increase in their desire to worship with many creating a plan to incorporate it into their daily lives. About 75% of participants also experienced an increased sense of purpose in worship. Additionally, the project resulted in substantial mean increases in respondents’ level of freedom in worship when in an environment with others who are displaying freedom in worship.

I initially had no plans for an online component, however, the incorporation of the virtual experience resulted in additional levels of learning. Although the virtual attendees often expressed a desire to have been there in person and/or related an enhanced experience in-person when attending some of each, similar overall gains were reported by the virtual attendees when compared with the in-person contingent. When examining at the micro-level, some differences emerge which may indicate a broader trend in the worshiper's experience when participating in private rather than in community. One such example is the greater number of virtual attendees reporting an increase in hearing God's voice (9/13) compared to the in-person group (7/14), including the opposite as less virtual than in-person attendees experienced physical manifestations of God's presence. The effectiveness of the online worship experience for the worshiper warrants further study as the Church continues to reach people virtually.

Some people choose to worship at home as they may enjoy the freedom and lack of constraint they feel worshipping God in private. As noted in the analysis, participants were vastly more comfortable expressing emotion and dance/movement when in private. However, they were nearly as comfortable lifting their hands in public and private. All three are exemplified and often commanded in the Bible, so why is that the one people were the most comfortable with? I propose that the participants were largely from churches where that is modeled enough to be considered normal. While they may not do it all the time, they are comfortable doing so because they know it is acceptable. Expressing emotion has become more acceptable in recent years, but there is evidently still a sense of vulnerability people are not willing to embrace. Dancing for the most part, however, is still relegated to those highly charismatic churches and deemed outside the

bounds of convention within the evangelical church. Yet, when participants were taught the biblical and neurological basis and encouraged to practice it in a safe space, their comfortability with it increased dramatically. Did that increased sense of freedom perhaps have an impact on their ability to experience the presence of God?

If worshipers might experience God to a greater degree when feeling free to express themselves, it is that much more critical that we foster atmospheres where people feel permission to exhibit these free expressions of worship. Critics might argue that it is enough for people to experience that level of worship in private and to not attempt to change the communal atmosphere. However, how many people worship in private outside of a weekly, at best, virtual worship service? Additionally, this project has reinforced the strength of “group think” in the neurotheology of worship. The atmosphere of freedom and grace in a room can indeed permeate individuals’ perspectives, drawing them ever deeper into God’s freedom and grace-filled outlook. If faith communities would provide communal environments that are considered safe spaces for people to express and experience the Spirit of the Lord in freedom, transformation and revival should be more easily realized.

Subsequently, an opportunity for further development exists with tailoring the workshop for worship leaders, in particular. It is difficult to lead people somewhere the leader has not been before, and I have seen too many worship leaders lacking in a practice of worship needed to create real intimacy with God. How can we expect congregations to grow deeper in their relationships with God, their desire for worship, and its sense of purpose in their own lives and communities if they do not have leadership who understands this firsthand? Accordingly, this could be taught in schools of worship

and colleges where worship leaders are being trained. All too often the musicianship and the theory of worship is emphasized with little or no training on worship as a daily relational practice meant to transform us and the environments we serve and live in. In colleges, this could be a hybrid class, including weekend attendance and subsequent study, practice, and journaling to maximize growth and encourage longevity of the routine.

The impact of having people from various faith communities and streams cannot be quantified, but it no doubt contributed to expanding one's perspective. Those from a charismatic bent likely encouraged freedom in those less comfortable with expressions of worship and, regardless of one's typical practice, honor and respect needed to be extended to the other. Notwithstanding, I can also see the value in tailoring the workshop toward a particular stream to reinforce and expand on certain ideas more familiar with one group or another. In that environment, one can also finetune the musical selections to include those that are familiar to that group and work within the existing atmosphere to encourage further growth.

It was disappointing to not have the time to teach further on healing in worship and intentionally pursue having participants wait on the Lord for physical and emotional healing, although several did receive healing anyway. I have personally experienced God's healing power in worship and have seen many others healed spontaneously while worshipping. This is a potential area of further research in tracking worshipers' testimonies of such healing, which can serve to increase others' faith for God to do the same. Regardless, God's healing will always remain a mystery, so we want to be careful not to worship as if it is a formula for healing. However, it is his presence that heals, so

fostering an atmosphere for his tangible presence to dwell along with an expectation of the Lord as desiring to heal can be vital to help worshipers experience his healing power.

Many people highlighted the idea of twelve minutes per day, expressing a desire to incorporate it into their lives. I see the value in further cultivating this, developing a system that helps to encourage this practice along with some tools to guide those engaging in it. Meditating on the Lord in worship when combined with seeking healing from the Lord—albeit, physical or healing—holds great potential for realizing his transformative power in our lives.

In preparing for the workshop, I set up a website, worshiptransforms.com, Facebook page, and YouTube channel by the same name to assist in registration and to create a placeholder for future use. I plan to produce content to equip people to adopt a lifestyle of worship and encourage believers to pursue unashamed intimacy with the Lord through worship. Worship Transforms will also become a non-profit to further the ideas fostered in this project and encourage godly transformation in individuals and communities. Eventually, I look forward to synthesizing the material into a book suitable for a broader Christian audience, as well as various learning institutions.

I have had an opportunity to regularly interact with those who attended the workshop from my home church. It has been encouraging to see their newfound freedom in worship and hear reports of the long-term impact the event has had on them. This is appearing to have ripple effects on those people around them as they express more freedom as well. The church is beginning a new campaign of reaching our community and people are excited about incorporating worship and prayer into that effort so we can encourage revival in and out of the church.

The biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary witness is clear—God has designed us to relate to him in intimate worship so that we can know and be known. As we draw near to him in worship without barriers, the Holy Spirit gently transforms us and reveals what is on his heart as we are given love, joy, peace, hope, and faith. These are necessary attributes if we are to see our circumstances and culture from his perspective. We can then prophetically worship, lifting the name of the Lord over every other name, so that he is glorified and his kingdom is further expanded. God is indeed inviting each one of us to partner with him in realizing the expansion of his kingdom and in experiencing his transformative power.

APPENDIX A
WORKSHOP PRE-SURVEY

Encounter: A Worship Transformation Workshop Pre-Survey

Participant # _____

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire and participate in this Encounter: An Invitation to Transformation Worship Workshop. Each person will be assigned a number so that all responses remain confidential. Statistics and comments from the survey will be shared in the project report, but your names will not be used. Please be sure to sign the consent form for the project. Thank you!! —*Lori T.*

As we seek to get a little background information, answer the following questions.

1. What is your gender? ☐ Female ☐ Male

2. What is your age?

<input type="checkbox"/> 20 years or younger	<input type="checkbox"/> 51-60 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 21-30 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 61-70 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 31-40 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 71-80 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 41-50 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 81 and over

3. Do you consider yourself a Christian with a faith in Jesus? Y or N

4. Mark true or false for each statement.

a. The Bible is integral to my Christianity.	T F
b. True faith is evidenced by a changed life.	T F
c. It is important to my faith to share the message of the gospel.	T F
d. The cross of Jesus is central to my Christianity.	T F

5. Is your attendance at the Encounter workshop in-person or virtual?

If you are attending the Encounter workshop virtually, please answer the following:

I am usually able to connect with God in worship as easily online as in-person.

Not at all Slightly Somewhat Very Extremely

Please note that for purposes of this survey, “worship” refers to any form of worship involving music.

The next section relates to your level of intimacy with and desire for God. Some commonly used terms to define intimacy are a close familiarity, comfortable friendship or a sharing of hearts. “In-to-me-see” is a willingness to be seen beneath the surface of the one we’re intimate with—a desire to know and be known without barriers.

Please use this definition to circle the best response to the following statements.

1. My perceived overall level of intimacy with God is:

Not at all A little A moderate amount A lot A great deal

2. My perceived level of intimacy with God during times of worship is:

Not at all A little A moderate amount A lot A great deal

3. My desire to meet with God through worship in a communal setting is:

Not at all A little A moderate amount A lot A great deal

4. My desire to meet with God through worship in private is:

Not at all A little A moderate amount A lot A great deal

5. My desire to meet with God through worship in private:

Not at all A little A moderate amount A lot A great deal

How often do you pursue God through worship in private?

Never Sometimes About half the time Most of the time Always

The next section has to do with how you “hear” God. People “hear” God communicate with them in various ways, such as impressions in your spirit, a “still small voice,” thoughts occurring “out of the blue,” particular words of a song or Bible verse jumping out to you, visual images in your mind and a reoccurrence of a memory are just a few.

Circle the word representing the frequency of how often you “hear” God communicate with you *during worship*.

1. *Impressions in my spirit*

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Regularly	Most of the time	All of the time
-------	--------	-----------	-----------	------------------	-----------------

2. *A still small voice*

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Regularly	Most of the time	All of the time
-------	--------	-----------	-----------	------------------	-----------------

3. *Thoughts occurring “out of the blue”*

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Regularly	Most of the time	All of the time
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4. *Particular words of a song or Bible verse being highlighted*

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Regularly	Most of the time	All of the time
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5. *Visual mental images*

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Regularly	Most of the time	All of the time
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6. *Reoccurrence of a memory*

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Regularly	Most of the time	All of the time
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This next section has to do with your physical awareness of God’s presence during worship. The following statements represent some of the ways the Holy Spirit may heighten an awareness of his presence in a physical sense.

For each of the following statements, circle the word that describes how often you experience each particular physical sensation during worship.

1. *I cry.*

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Regularly	Most of the time	All of the time
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2. *I feel tingling in my body.*

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Regularly	Most of the time	All of the time
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3. *I get goosebumps.*

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Regularly	Most of the time	All of the time
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4. *I may quiver or shake.*

Never Seldom Sometimes Regularly Most of the time All of the time

5. *I feel unexplainable heat.*

Never Seldom Sometimes Regularly Most of the time All of the time

6. *I feel unexplainable cold.*

Never Seldom Sometimes Regularly Most of the time All of the time

7. *I experience inexplicable laughter.*

Never Seldom Sometimes Regularly Most of the time All of the time

We will now consider your emotional responses in worship, such as love, joy, peace, faith and hope. You will rate how often, as well as the degree to which you experience them for each statement.

Circle one for each statement.

1. *I experience feelings of love in worship.*

Never Seldom Sometimes Regularly Most of the time All of the time

2. *I experience feelings of joy in worship.*

Never Seldom Sometimes Regularly Most of the time All of the time

3. *I experience feelings of peace in worship.*

Never Seldom Sometimes Regularly Most of the time All of the time

4. *I experience feelings of faith in worship.*

Never Seldom Sometimes Regularly Most of the time All of the time

5. *I experience feelings of hope in worship.*

Never Seldom Sometimes Regularly Most of the time All of the time

This section deals with your beliefs regarding physical and emotional healing, first in general, and then specific to worship.

Mark the most appropriate response for each statement.

1. *I believe God is my healer.*

Strongly disagree Somewhat disagree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat agree Strongly agree

2. *I believe that God desires for me to experience healing.*

Strongly disagree Somewhat disagree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat agree Strongly agree

3. *I approach God in worship believing that he may heal me.*

Strongly disagree Somewhat disagree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat agree Strongly agree

4. *I have experienced physical healing in worship.*

Strongly disagree Somewhat disagree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat agree Strongly agree

5. *I have experienced emotional healing in worship.*

Strongly disagree Somewhat disagree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat agree Strongly agree

Did you come today with any noticeable physical complaints? Y N

**This section relates to your views on your sense of purpose in worship.
Circle the most appropriate response for each statement.**

1. *My worship of God is important in establishing His kingdom on earth.*

Strongly disagree Somewhat disagree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat agree Strongly agree

2. *I believe that my worship is an effective spiritual weapon.*

Strongly disagree Somewhat disagree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat agree Strongly agree

3. *Worship is a necessary element to my spiritual walk with God and my everyday life.*

Strongly disagree Somewhat disagree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat agree Strongly agree

4. *I feel a sense of purpose when I worship.*

Strongly disagree Somewhat disagree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat agree Strongly agree

5. *I regularly engage in worship as a form of intercession for myself and/or others.*

Strongly disagree Somewhat disagree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat agree Strongly agree

Our last section measures your comfort level with physical expressions of worship in public and private.

Mark the most appropriate response for each statement.

1. *I am self-conscious of what others around me think while worshiping in a communal setting.*

Never Sometimes About half the time Most of the time
Always

2. *I am comfortable with dancing/free movement as a form of worship in a communal setting.*

Never Sometimes About half the time Most of the time
Always

3. *I am comfortable with dancing/free movement as a form of worship in private.*

Never Sometimes About half the time Most of the time
Always

4. *I am comfortable lifting my hands in worship in a communal setting.*

Never Sometimes About half the time Most of the time
Always

5. *I am comfortable lifting my hands in worship in private.*

Never	Sometimes	About half the time	Most of the time
Always			

6. *I am comfortable expressing my emotions during worship in a communal setting.*

Never	Sometimes	About half the time	Most of the time
Always			

7. *I am comfortable expressing my emotions during worship in private.*

Never	Sometimes	About half the time	Most of the time
Always			

Mark the most appropriate response for each statement.

1. *If someone else is comfortable with dancing/free movement, then I am comfortable with dancing/free movement as a form of worship in a communal setting.*

Never	Sometimes	About half the time	Most of the time
Always			

2. *If someone else is comfortable lifting their hands during worship, then I am comfortable lifting my hands in a communal setting.*

Never	Sometimes	About half the time	Most of the time
Always			

3. *If others are expressing emotion, then I am comfortable expressing my emotions during worship in a communal setting.*

Never	Sometimes	About half the time	Most of the time
Always			

What do you hope to gain from your attendance at Encounter: A Worship Transformation Workshop?

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.

Consent Form

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to investigate your experience with musical worship and encountering God in that process. This research is being conducted by Lori True, Doctor of Ministry Student at United Theological Seminary. In this research you will take part in a pre and post survey answering questions related to your experience with the Encountering God in Worship workshop. Your identity will remain anonymous throughout the research. Please be assured that any information that you provide will be held in strict confidence. Some participants may be invited to take part in a small group discussion or be interviewed regarding your thoughts and experiences with this worship workshop. Upon completion of the overall study all files and recordings pertaining to the surveys, discussion group, and interviews will be deleted/disposed of. In the presentation of any written materials or publications that might arise out of this research, the identity of the participant will be limited to generalized references as pertaining to important categorization such as spiritual background or gender identity. In addition, at no time will your personal identity be disclosed alongside any of your responses. Please understand that your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time during this study.

I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and understand, the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate.

Name _____

Signed _____ Date _____

If under 18 years of age, also include signature of parent:/guardian:

_____ Date _____

APPENDIX B

WORKSHOP POST-SURVEY

Encounter: A Worship Transformation Workshop Post-Survey

Name _____ Participant # _____

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire and participate in this Encounter : A Worship Transformation Workshop. Each person has been assigned a number so that all responses remain confidential. Statistics and comments from the survey will be shared in the project report, but your names will never be used. Thank you!! —Lori T.

If you attended the workshop virtually, please answer the following questions related to your experience online.

The degree to which I was able to connect with God in worship online during the workshop compared to previous times in worship online was:

Less than normal

About the same

Better than normal

The following section contains questions exploring your perceived intimacy level with God during attendance at this workshop and in the future.

Circle the best response to the following statements.

1. My perceived overall level of intimacy with God during the workshop was:

Not at all

Slightly

Somewhat

Very

Extremely

My perceived overall level of intimacy with God during the workshop was:

Less than before

About the same

Deeper than before

2. My perceived level of intimacy with God in worship during the workshop was:

Not at all

Slightly

Somewhat

Very

Extremely

My perceived level of intimacy with God in worship during the worship was:

Less than before

About the same

Deeper than before

3. My desire to meet with God through worship in a communal setting after the workshop is:

Not at all

Slightly

Somewhat

Very

Extremely

My desire to meet with God through worship in a communal setting after the workshop is:

Less than before

About the same

Stronger than before

4. My desire to meet with God through worship in private after the workshop is:

Not at all

Slightly

Somewhat

Very

Extremely

My desire to meet with God through worship in private after the workshop is:

Less than before

About the same

Stronger than before

5. After attending this workshop, I anticipate pursuing God in worship in private:

Not at all

Seldom

A few times/month

Once or twice/week

Several times/week

Daily

Several times/day

After attending this workshop, I anticipate pursuing God in worship in private:

Less often than before

About the same

More often than before

In this next section you will answer questions based on how you may have “heard” God throughout worship in the workshop.

Circle the word representing the frequency of how often you “heard” God communicate with you during worship at the workshop for each.

7. Impressions in my spirit

Never

Seldom

Sometimes

Frequently

Regularly

Always

I “heard” God through impressions in my spirit during worship at the workshop:

Less than normal

About the same

More than normal

8. A still small voice

Never

Seldom

Sometimes

Frequently

Regularly

Always

I “heard” God through a still small voice during worship at the workshop:

Less than normal

About the same

More than normal

9. *Thoughts occurring “out of the blue”*

Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Regularly Always

I “heard” God through thoughts occurring “out of the blue” during worship at the workshop:

Less than normal About the same More than normal

10. *Particular words of a song or Bible verse being highlighted*

Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Regularly Always

I “heard” God through particular words of a song or Bible verse being highlighted during worship at the workshop:

Less than normal About the same More than normal

11. *Visual mental images*

Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Regularly Always

I “heard” God through visual mental images during worship at the workshop:

Less than normal About the same More than normal

12. *Reoccurrence of a memory*

Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Regularly Always

I “heard” God through reoccurrence of a memory during worship at the workshop:

Less than normal About the same More than normal

Please write in which ones you have experienced before the workshop but may not have previously attributed to God.

The following questions have to do with your physical awareness of his presence during worship while at the workshop.

For each of the following statements, circle the word for each statement that describes how often you experienced that physical sensation during worship at the workshop.

8. *I cried during worship at the workshop.*

Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Regularly Always

I cried during worship at the workshop:

Less than normal About the same More than normal

9. *I felt tingling in my body during worship at the workshop.*

Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Regularly Always

I felt tingling in my body during worship at the workshop:

Less than normal About the same More than normal

10. *I experienced goosebumps in my body during worship at the workshop.*

Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Regularly Always

I experienced goosebumps in my body during worship at the workshop:

Less than normal About the same More than normal

11. *I experienced quivering or shaking during worship at the workshop.*

Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Regularly Always

I experienced quivering or shaking during worship at the workshop:

Less than normal About the same More than normal

12. *I felt an unexplainable heat during worship at the workshop.*

Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Regularly Always

I felt an unexplainable heat during worship at the workshop:

Less than normal About the same More than normal

13. *I felt an unexplainable cold during worship at the workshop.*

Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Regularly Always

I felt an unexplainable cold during worship at the workshop:

Less than normal About the same More than normal

14. *During worship at the workshop, I experienced inexplicable laughter.*

Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Regularly Always

During worship at the workshop, I experienced inexplicable laughter:

Less than normal About the same More than normal

Describe, if you can, how experiencing any of these sensations made you feel. If you'd like to provide some context, please explain here.

We will now consider what emotional responses you experienced during worship while at the workshop. Circle the degree to which you experienced any of the following feelings at any point during worship.

1. *I experienced feelings of love during worship at the workshop:*

Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Regularly Always

The degree to which I experienced feelings of love during worship at the workshop was:

Less than normal About the same More than normal

2. *I experienced feelings of joy during worship at the workshop:*

Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Regularly Always

The degree to which I experienced feelings of joy during worship at the workshop was:

Less than normal About the same More than normal

3. *I experienced feelings of peace during worship at the workshop:*

Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Regularly Always

The degree to which I experienced feelings of peace during worship at the workshop was:

Less than normal About the same More than normal

4. *I experienced feelings of faith during worship at the workshop:*

Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Regularly Always

The degree to which I experienced feelings of faith during worship at the workshop was:

Less than normal About the same More than normal

5. *I experienced feelings of hope during worship at the workshop:*

Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Regularly Always

The degree to which I experienced feelings of hope during worship at the workshop was:

Less than normal About the same More than normal

This section deals with your beliefs and experiences during and following the workshop regarding physical and emotional healing. Mark the most appropriate response for each statement.

6. *I believe God is my healer.*

Strongly disagree Moderately disagree Agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Unsure

My belief that God is my healer since attending the workshop has:

Decreased Stayed the same Increased

7. *I believe that God desires for me to experience healing.*

Strongly disagree Moderately disagree Agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Unsure

My belief that God desires for me to experience healing since attending the workshop has:

Decreased Stayed the same Increased

8. *I approach God in worship believing that he may heal me.*

Strongly disagree Moderately disagree Agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Unsure

My expectation that God may heal me in worship since attending the workshop has:

Decreased Stayed the same Increased

9. *I have experienced physical healing in worship.*

Strongly disagree Moderately disagree Agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Unsure

The degree to which I experienced physical healing in worship during the workshop was:

Less than normal About the same Greater than normal

10. *I have experienced emotional healing in worship.*

Strongly disagree Moderately disagree Agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Unsure

The degree to which I experienced emotional healing in worship during the workshop was:

Less than normal About the same Greater than normal

If you came today with any noticeable physical complaint, please note the complaint and level of severity immediately following the workshop.

Very slight 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely severe

Please elaborate if you experienced any physical or emotional healing in worship during the workshop.

This section relates to your views on your sense of purpose in worship *since attending the workshop*. Circle the most appropriate response for each statement.

6. *My worship of God is important in establishing His kingdom on earth.*

Strongly disagree Moderately disagree Agree Moderately agree Strongly agree Unsure

My belief that my worship of God is important to establishing His kingdom on earth since attending the workshop has:

Decreased Stayed the same Increased

7. *I believe that my worship is an effective spiritual weapon.*

Strongly disagree Moderately disagree Agree Moderately agree Strongly agree
Unsure

My belief that my worship is an effective spiritual weapon since attending the workshop has:

Decreased Stayed the same Increased

8. *Worship is a necessary element to my spiritual walk with God and my everyday life.*

Strongly disagree Moderately disagree Agree Moderately agree Strongly agree
Unsure

My belief that worship is a necessary element to my spiritual walk with God and my everyday life since attending the workshop has:

Decreased Stayed the same Increased

9. *I feel a sense of purpose when I worship.*

Strongly disagree Moderately disagree Agree Moderately agree Strongly agree
Unsure

The sense of purpose I feel when I worship since attending the workshop has:

Decreased Stayed the same Increased

10. *I intend to engage in worship as a form of intercession for myself and/or others.*

Never Seldom Occasionally Frequently Regularly Always

My intent to engage in worship as a form of intercession for myself and/or others since the workshop has:

Decreased Stayed the same Increased

Our last section measures your comfort level with physical expressions of worship in public and private. Mark the most appropriate response for each statement.

3. *I am self-conscious of what others around me are thinking while worshiping in a communal setting.*

Not at all Slightly Somewhat Very Extremely

The degree to which I am self-conscious of what others around me are thinking while worshiping in a communal setting since attending the workshop has:

Decreased Stayed the same Increased

4. *I am comfortable with dancing/free movement as a form of worship in a communal setting since attending the workshop.*

Not at all Slightly Only if someone else is Moderately Very Extremely

The degree to which I am comfortable with dancing/free movement as a form of worship in a communal setting since attending the workshop has:

Decreased Stayed the same Increased

5. *I am comfortable with dancing/free movement as a form of worship in private since attending the workshop.*

Not at all Slightly Only if someone else is Moderately Very Extremely

The degree to which I am comfortable with dancing/free movement as a form of worship in private since attending the workshop has:

Decreased Stayed the same Increased

6. *I am comfortable lifting my hands in worship in a communal setting since attending the workshop.*

Never When instructed Seldom Occasionally Frequently
Regularly

The degree to which I am comfortable lifting my hands in worship in a communal setting since attending the workshop has:

Decreased Stayed the same Increased

7. *I am comfortable lifting my hands in worship in private since attending the workshop.*

Not at all Slightly Somewhat Very Extremely

The degree to which I am comfortable lifting my hands in worship in private since attending the workshop has:

Decreased Stayed the same Increased

8. *I am comfortable expressing my emotions during worship in a communal setting since attending the workshop.*

Not at all Slightly Somewhat Very Extremely

The degree to which I am comfortable expressing my emotions during worship in a communal setting since attending the workshop has:

Decreased Stayed the same Increased

9. *I am comfortable expressing my emotions during worship in private.*

Not at all Slightly Somewhat Very Extremely

The degree to which I am comfortable expressing my emotions during worship in private since attending the workshop has:

Decreased Stayed the same Increased

Please elaborate on what you may have learned or experienced during the workshop. For each of the questions below, write your response.

1. *During this workshop, how have you seen a shift in your intimacy with God?*
2. *Please describe how what you have learned and experienced in this workshop has made an impact on you.*

APPENDIX C**FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

Focus Group Discussion Questions

Context: Today we will be discussing your experience in Encountering God in Worship and its impact on you.

1. What concepts discussed in this workshop are new or somewhat unfamiliar to you?
2. What barriers to intimacy with God in worship have you discovered through the sessions, if any, in your own life? Please elaborate.
3. Discuss any breakthroughs you may have experienced in today's session.
4. In what way did you experience a physical awareness of God's presence in worship, if at all? What were your feelings about this at the time?
5. Can you describe how you may have experienced God in a new way today?
6. Name and describe some of your emotions during worship. Did any of these emotions continue after worship ended? Please elaborate.
7. Did you experience any degree of physical healing during worship? If so, please describe and utilize a scale of 1 to 10 to rate your initial pain/condition as well as after any degree of healing.
8. Do you feel you experienced any healing of inner hurts or emotional pain you may have walked in with during any of the worship sessions? If so, please describe.
9. We're interested in learning how you may have "heard" God communicate with you (via impressions in your spirit, a still, small voice, thoughts occurring "out of the blue," words of a song/Bible highlighted, visual mental images, a memory reoccurring) during worship in the workshop. Can you elaborate? How did this make you feel?
10. Do you feel your intimacy with God has grown through this workshop? If so, please describe how.
11. How do you envision your patterns of worship shifting after this workshop? More or less often?
12. How has your perspective on worship shifted in what you've learned and engaged in during the workshop?

Do you feel any differently about your sense of purpose in worship? If so, how?

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

Context: Today you will be asked questions related to your experience at the Encountering God in Worship workshop and how it may have impacted you since the event.

1. How has your expectation of how God wants to meet with you in worship shifted since the workshop?
2. Describe how you may experience God in worship differently than before the workshop.
3. In what way has there been a shift in how you worship since the event, if any?
4. How has the way in which you think about worship changed since the workshop, if at all?
5. Have you noticed a difference in your desire to worship since the workshop? If so, please explain, including whether the frequency of your worship has been affected.
6. What has been your biggest takeaway from the workshop?
7. How has this impacted your overall relationship with God?

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